MEMORIES OF A SIEGE
ISTVÁN DEÁK

WHAT PAUL HACKETT'S LOSS MEANS FOR DEMOCRATS
MICHAEL CROWLEY

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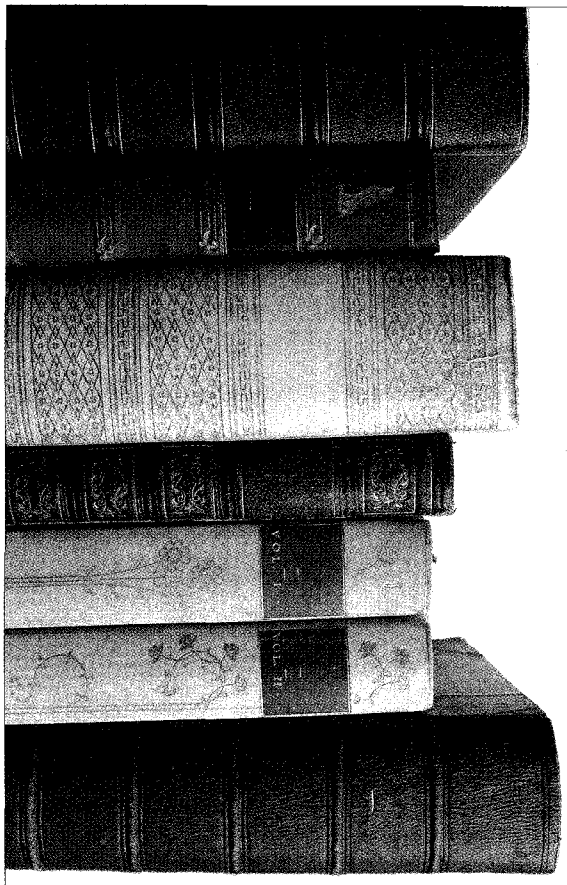

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CORRESPONDENCE

FIT FOR COMMAND?

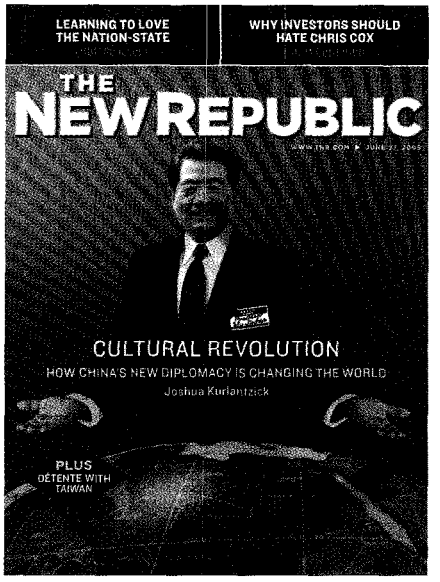
MARTIN PERETZ CLAIMS THAT JOHN Bolton's nomination is opposed because he "believe[s] that American democracy has enemies" ("Impolitic," June 27). This is nonsense. I personally oppose Bolton because he is simply incompetent. In his years as undersecretary of state for arms control, he diddled on both North Korea and Iran, allowing the former to build WMD and forcing Europe to take the lead on the latter. At the same time, he has done nothing to secure Russia's loose nukes. Indeed, Bolton seems to be too busy kissing up and kicking down to actually get any work done. Peretz seems to believe that mere ideological correctness should be sufficient justification for promotion. As an American taxpayer, I would prefer to see actual results.

CHRISTOPHER TWIGG
Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

PERETZ'S ASSERTION THAT BOLTON'S disagreements with CIA intelligence are a sign of his wisdom—based on the CIA's track record of "peddling feeble and dangerous intelligence for decades"—would make sense only if emerging facts had ultimately proved that Bolton was correct. Also, the magazine's assertion that liberal grumbling about conservative bias at Fox News has grown tiresome "because the bias is so blindingly obvious, it hardly warrants mentioning" may be true in Washington, but there are plenty of good folks outside of the Beltway who actually buy into Fox's "Fair and Balanced" con ("Notebook," June 27).

PAT MALACH
Hillsboro, Oregon

WHY IS IT THAT, WHEN IT COMES to acknowledging the influence and accomplishments of African Americans, many pundits continue to try to whitewash us right out of history? Peretz was only the latest to commit this offense with his comment that Bill Clinton "did not appoint one African American to a truly significant office in the executive branch." That statement does a disservice to Clinton, to the African Americans who served with him, and to history. Do the names Ron Brown, Mike Espy, Jesse



Brown, Alexis Herman, Hazel O'Leary, Togo West, and Rodney Slater mean anything to you? They represent the largest number of African Americans ever appointed to Cabinet-level positions, before or after the current administration—more than all other presidents combined. Clinton's African American judicial appointments also far exceeded those of any other president in history. In addition, Clinton appointed seven African Americans to the uppermost staff level in the White House, also the largest number in history. They included Bob Nash, Thurgood Marshall Jr., Minyon Moore, Ben Johnson, Mark Lindsay, Sharon Farmer, and me, the first director of speechwriting for an American president.

It is a travesty of history to deny that those appointments and those African Americans were "truly significant." It is unfortunate to have to point out the huge lead Clinton has over any other president, including the current one, when it comes to putting together an administration that looks like America. After nearly 400 years, isn't it about time we stopped obliterating the accomplishments of African Americans from the annals of history?

J. TERRY EDMONDS
New York, New York

ROAD RAGE

THE EDITORS CALL IT A "SCANDAL" that the energy bill passed by Congress last week fails to encourage—or even address—increased miles-per-gallon (MPG) standards ("Power Failure," July 4). But increased MPG standards are by no means the panacea that Congress is failing to notice. If demand decreased due to more efficient fuel usage, we could only enjoy lower gas prices temporarily. Cheap gas would lead more people to drive to work, for example, instead of spending a dollar to take a bus that goes to the same place. If Congress wants to do something about the environment, how about federal funding to improve public transportation? Better subway systems and commuter rails may inspire Americans to make crucial lifestyle changes that will help the environment.

JENNIFER PAGE
Cleveland, Ohio

HEARING TRUTH

NOAM SCHEIBER TAKES A RATHER cavalier view of the "mock" hearing held by Representative John Conyers regarding the Iraq war and the Downing Street Memo ("Primary Concern," July 4). Having viewed the entire three-hour broadcast on C-SPAN, it is clear that the central issue raised by the memo is not that "the admininstration had already decided to invade" (many of us suspected that at the time), but rather the assessment by the then-head of British intelligence that "the intelligence and facts were being fixed around the policy." This is not, as Scheiber suggests, a case of liberals "channeling their most conspiratorial impulses." This is the beginning of a serious inquiry about the manipulation of facts in a run-up to war.

ROB COEN
Lake in the Hills, Illinois

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Racial Justice

TRB

FROM WASHINGTON

CONSERVATIVES HAD LOTS OF reasons to like John Roberts's nomination to the Supreme Court. But the one they cited most eagerly was that the nominee, barring some unforeseen revelation, was neither a woman nor a minority. David Brooks praised President Bush for "mov[ing] beyond the tokenism of identity politics." *National Review*'s Jonah Goldberg was relieved that Bush had "tagged a plain old really smart white guy." "[B]y not worrying about walking out to the podium last night accompanied by a white male," William Kristol concluded, "Bush did something important and courageous."

At the time, the glee with which conservatives greeted Roberts's white maleness fell into the category of slightly weird but hardly worth a second thought. In retrospect, it was rather telling. To the extent that Roberts's nomination has been defined in the early going, it is civil rights issues that have defined it. That has, in turn, produced two reactions on the right. On the one hand, conservatives have continued to warm to Roberts the more they learn about his Reagan-era writings on civil rights. But these discoveries have also created a gnawing, if not quite urgent, sense of anxiety among Republicans—and rightly so.

Roberts comes across as nothing if not conservative in the thousands of pages of documents he wrote as a Reagan-era legal adviser. Roberts favored a highly restrictive interpretation of the Voting Rights Act. He concluded that Congress had the authority to pass so-called court-stripping legislation in order to prevent courts from imposing busing as a remedy for segregation. He took a dim view of a Justice Department decision granting restitution to people discouraged from applying to jobs for reasons related to race. He argued against an affirmative action program on the grounds that it led to the hiring of unqualified candidates.

In the early '80s, Roberts's positions on these issues were not only popular among conservatives, they were central to what it meant to be a Reaganite, both politically and ideologically. The conservatism of the era was very much a reaction to the perceived liberal excesses of the 1960s and 1970s, particularly on matters of civil rights. Ronald Reagan won states like New York, New Jersey, Michigan, and Pennsylvania thanks largely to the resentment that blue-collar, white Democrats harbored toward welfare, busing, and affirmative action. Meanwhile, the '80s saw elite universities churn out hoards of conservative ideologues radicalized by the political correctness they felt pervaded their campuses. Northwestern University Law Professor Steven Calabresi has said he founded the Federalist Society, the conservative legal organization, to counter liberals' dominance at Yale Law School, where he was a student in the early '80s.

But, while conservative elites still harbor these resentments, things have changed among voters. Bill Clinton helped defuse race as a political issue across the Northeast and Midwest when he signed welfare reform in 1996. Around the same time, race was creating political problems for the GOP. A *Wall Street Journal* poll found that 66 percent of Americans thought the GOP was intolerant. Republicans began suffering defections among Sunbelt Latinos and moderates nationally thanks to the punitive cast of their immigration and welfare policies.

The coup de grâce came when then-Governor Bush, partly as a concession to political reality and partly as a result of his own personal decency, self-consciously fashioned himself as a new, tolerant brand of Republican. Bush has largely repudiated appeals to racial resentments. He has proposed instead to liberalize immigration and has scrupulously practiced affirmative action within his own administration. While the Reagan/Bush I/Newt Gingrich coalition largely repelled minorities with its preoccupation with race, the Bush II coalition directly enlists socially conservative blacks, Latinos, and women (albeit in a new crusade against gays).

In this context, it's hard not to see Roberts's memos as a political liability. Conservative bloggers have spent much of the last two weeks defending the nominee's individual positions—often with justification. A careful reading of the memos doesn't evoke the mind of a racist. It evokes a principled, if rock-ribbed, conservatism—someone devoted to the belief that government does more harm than good when it relies on ambitious means to defend civil rights.

But, collectively, the weight of his civil rights positions have the effect of casting Roberts as someone out of step with the current political consensus on race, or at least with the tentative peace Bush's GOP has forged. And the GOP establishment knows it. In the days since Roberts's memos began trickling out, administration surrogates have mostly sought to distance Roberts from his own paper trail. Asked about the memos, administration spokesman Scott McClellan would say only that "the files that you're referring to mostly are from about 20 years ago." South Carolina Senator Lindsey Graham argued that Roberts was merely advising a "client": "I've represented rapists, murder[er]s. ... You shouldn't hold it against me the thoughts of my client." The few times the GOP has engaged on substance have been to repudiate a position attributed to Roberts. Last week, Kentucky Senator Mitch McConnell announced that, contrary to popular opinion, Roberts had actually opposed court-stripping. (Roberts opposed it in practice but believed Congress had the power to do it.)

For Republicans, the risks posed by Roberts are the mirror image of the risks posed by Robert Bork. Bork, with his shaggy hair and condescending manner, was a tough sell in the Senate. But he posed no long-term risk to a party that largely shared his views on civil rights. Roberts isn't likely to encounter problems in the Senate. But, in closing ranks behind him, Republicans risk handing Democrats a political wedge. In 2004, Bush increased his share of the black and Latino vote by roughly 2 and 6 percentage points, respectively. Karl Rove believes this trend is the key to a future GOP majority. Yet these inroads are fragile. As Deval Patrick, a former Clinton civil rights official, said after Republican Party Chairman Ken Mehlman apologized to the NAACP for his party's checkered racial past, "The Republicans have a lot to answer for." If Rove's majority fails to materialize, we may one day look back on Roberts as the reason why.

NOAM SCHEIBER

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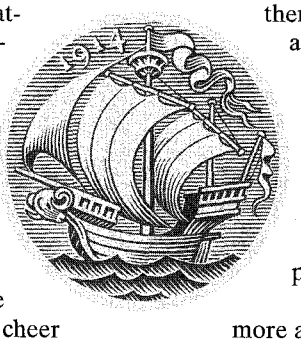
Pluripotent

IN A CAPITAL awash in falsehoods, no falsehood has been greater than this recent pronouncement by Senator John Cornyn: "We have no religious tests for public office in this country." About the Constitution, this is right. About the Bush administration, this is wrong, ludicrously wrong. Never in modernity has American politics been more religiose. Conservatives seem to do nothing except in the name of God, and liberals are increasingly embarrassed that in their policies, not to mention in their worldviews, they may sometimes be godless. At the door to American democracy, God is the bouncer.

Senator Bill Frist's reversal on embryonic stem-cell research is all the more remarkable for having taken place in this sanctimonious environment. On the floor of the Senate on July 29, the hitherto soldierly Frist broke ranks with his president on an issue of great ethical and political significance. "Adult stem cells are powerful," Frist said. "They've effectively treated, today, many diseases and, theoretically, are promising for many other diseases. But embryonic stem cells, because they are pluripotent, because they can become any other tissue—heart, lung, neural tissue—and because they renew and replicate themselves infinitely, they are uniquely necessary for potentially treating other diseases." Golden words, and not customary ones. And he ringingly concluded: "Cure today may be just a theory, a hope, a dream. But the promise is powerful enough that I believe this research deserves our increased energy and focus. Embryonic stem-cell research must be supported."

A flat-worlder conceding that the world is round! The effect was exhilarating. For a few summer moments, and then for the duration of this difficult and momentous debate, the leader of the Republican majority surrendered his superstition and joined the reality-based community. The fact that the renegade is also a physician adds more gravity to his championing of science. The moral character of medicine has for too long been slandered in the stem-cell debate, in which a struggle to save lives is regularly misrepresented as a conspiracy to destroy them.

Why did Frist do it? There are two explanations. The first is conscience: that he changed his mind as a matter of principle, which is always an admirable thing to do, whatever the principle. The second is expedience: that he worried about the impact upon his presidential ambitions of his recent adventures with the religious right, notably in the dismal Terri Schiavo affair. The good news is that either of these explanations should bring cheer to liberal Americans—even more, to rational Americans. If the majority leader is evolving philosophically away from the White House orthodoxy, American society can only be the better for it. And, if he is merely being pluripotent and acting tactically, it is heartening to learn that it is now politically shrewd to pander to reason rather than to unreason. Cynics are always barometrically useful.



No sooner had Frist announced his new view than his erstwhile Christian allies denounced him for opportunism. He "has gravely miscalculated," the chairman of Focus on the Family Action thundered. "To push for the expansion of this suspect and unethical science will be rightly seen by America's values voters as the worst kind of betrayal—choosing politics over principle." Similar sentiments were harshly expressed by the director of the Christian Defense Coalition and the president of the Family Research Council. So Frist was acting courageously, at least where he lives. But he chose to live there, and it is hard to work up much compassion for him. After all, the everything-or-nothing mentality of the Christian right, its politics of anathema, has been plain for a long time. Politically speaking, the Christian right is a kind of sacralized protection racket: nice little presidential campaign you have, pity if something should happen to it. Demanding greater tolerance from Americans who disagree with them, they show no tolerance for Americans who disagree with them, and certainly not for the deviationists (an ugly but apt term that derives from an older and decidedly nontheistic absolutism in politics) in their midst.

But could it be that more and more Americans are tiring of absolutism in politics, and of the president's weakness for extreme positions, and of divine answers to profane questions? If so, the Frist reversal may be more damaging to the White House than the Rove scandal. This may be just a theory, a hope, a dream. But the promise is powerful enough.... ■

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NOTEBOOK

BUSH OKs TEACHING ID . . . BRIDGES EVERYWHERE BUT D.C.

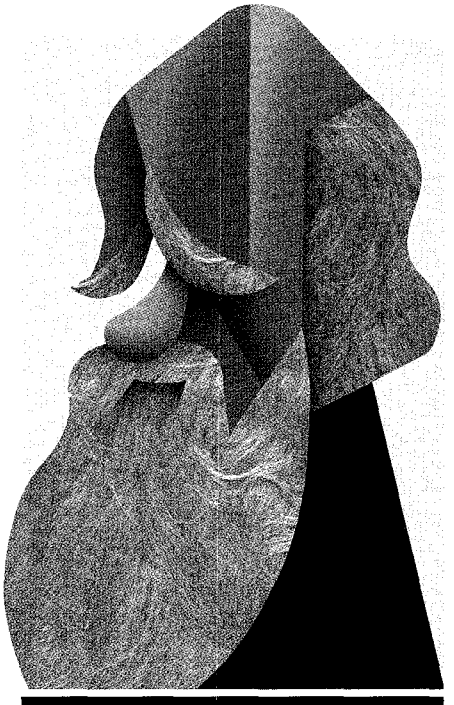
UNINTELLIGENT BY DESIGN

AT A MEDIA ROUNDTABLE MONday, President Bush, a self-professed believer in educational standards, was asked whether he thought intelligent design (ID)—the belief that the complexity of life proves it was created by a supernatural entity—should be taught in public schools. His reply: "I think that part of education is to expose people to different schools of thought. . . . You're asking me whether or not people ought to be exposed to different ideas—the answer is yes." Set aside, for the moment, the political points Bush is trying to score with the religious right. If Bush supports "exposing" students to ideas that no legitimate scientist supports, where does he draw the line? Geocentrism, for example, has long been disparaged by mainstream astronomers. But why shouldn't we expose students to the work of the few stalwart thinkers who continue to fight the good fight against the Copernican revolution?

Bush demurred on the question of whether he himself believed in ID. What's important, he said, is that teaching ID would ensure that "people can understand what the debate is about." But there's no substantive debate over ID—as a belief, rather than a scientific theory, it cannot be disproved—only a pedagogical conflict over whether religion should hold the same status as science in our classrooms. In fact, teaching students ID would just show them that, in matters of scientific inquiry, it's OK to match unanswered questions with faith instead of reason. Of course, given the way Bush handles the rest of his agenda, that may be all right with him.

A BRIDGE TO NOWHERE

DON YOUNG'S WAY CONJURES images of a quaint little street akin to a "lane" or a "drive," a modest tribute to a beloved public servant. But the planned bridge connecting Anchorage, Alaska, with the sparsely populated section of land across the Knik Arm Channel will be anything but modest. Named in honor of the House Transportation Committee chairman who helped push the project through Congress as part of last week's transportation bill, the two-mile span will rival the Golden Gate Bridge in length, and the $229 million in federal funding approved for it is expected to be just the tip of the iceberg. The bill, in which Alaska received almost $1 billion in pork-barrel projects, also included $220 million for another huge bridge connecting the city of Ketchikan (population 8,000) with nearby Gravina Island (population 50).



Charles Darwin

Left out of the $286 billion transportation bill, however, was $400 million in funding for another namesake bridge, of sorts, in Washington, D.C. In 2001, the Kennedy Center announced plans for a massive plaza to be built over the Potomac Freeway, which would link the isolated performing arts center with the National Mall. Congress had supported the idea but failed to provide the funding on which the project hinged. According to *The Washington Post*, Kennedy Center Trustee James V. Kimsey "said he understood that Congress had to make tough choices with the war in Iraq and the president's demand for a tight budget." If he believes that, we know of a bridge in Brooklyn that's for sale. Or, better yet, a couple in Alaska.

ABOUT THOSE OIL FIELDS

GENERAL GEORGE CASEY'S STATEment last week that a "fairly substantial" troop reduction in Iraq could take place by next spring carried a couple of caveats. The biggest, obviously, is the prospect of Iraqi political progress. Then again, the Bush administration is excellent at declaring progress to be forever on the march despite its sluggishness on the ground, so maybe this isn't such a problem. But there's another big caveat, this one unstated: We're building permanent military bases in Iraq.

You're not supposed to say this, because the administration is unwavering in its Talmudic formulation that "we will stay in Iraq as long as we are needed, and not a day longer," as President Bush reiterated in his late June speech at Fort Bragg. But he has declined numerous opportunities to renounce a permanent presence in Iraq, as John Kerry did during last year's first presidential debate. *The Washington Post* reported in May that U.S. military officials had plans to expand four bases "with a more permanent character" in order to consolidate forces from over 100 hastily constructed garrisons. But officials heatedly deny any inference that bases designed to be enduring will, in fact, endure. Now, the *Los Angeles Times* reports that the first "long-term" base is being built in the town of Rawah as part of a plan to curb infiltration of foreign jihadists from the Iraq-Syria border.

There are just two problems with that: First, as the *Times* reports, "Some U.S.

DAVID COWLES

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military officials acknowledge that even with the base, they probably will never be able to fully close off the border." And second, a long-term U.S. presence is debilitating to the political process that we're supposedly in Iraq to create. No less a pro-war eminence than U.K. Foreign Minister Jack Straw told the *Financial Times* this week, "[A]lthough we are part of the security solution [in Iraq], we are also part of the problem." And, as long as we're confirming Iraqi conspiracy theories, we might as well steal some oil.

OUTFOXING THEMSELVES

EVER SINCE THE FOX NEWS CHANnel rose to the top of the cable news heap by putting its "fair and balanced"—more accurately described as "right-wing and biased"—stamp on the news, the other cable networks have faced a dilemma. If they can't beat Fox, should they join 'em? MSNBC, at least, has clearly decided to. As *Slate's* Jack Shafer recently put it, the network has "given every nonliberal listed in the Yellow Pages a show"—including, most recently, Tucker Carlson, who joins the former Republican Representative Joe Scarborough as the host of his own hourlong nighttime slot.

But conservative complaints about the liberal media die hard, and now Accuracy in Media (AIM), a group whose raison d'être is to make such complaints, is targeting MSNBC. AIM's beef? Carlson and Scarborough are being muzzled! "Shows featuring conservative hosts like Carlson and Scarborough seem designed to prevent them from speaking to issues of concern to conservatives," AIM editor Cliff Kincaid griped this week. Kincaid pointed out that Carlson is sometimes joined on his show by liberal guests—one of whom "is a lesbian with hair so short that she looks like a man"—while Scarborough "has been endlessly covering missing-person cases." Poor MSNBC. Sometimes joining 'em doesn't even work. ■

TNR.commentary

&c.

LABOR PAINS: Philip Terzian, discussing the recent split within the AFL-CIO in the August 8 *Weekly Standard*, writes:

> Every other year or so the media discover a new generation of undergraduates, fed up with decadence and materialism on campus, who plan to become labor organizers when they graduate. Perhaps the kids were diverted into investment banking; in any event, campaigns to organize workers in the past decade, particularly in the private sector, have been notably unsuccessful.

But campaigns to organize workers have not been unsuccessful. Unions have organized more than 3.2 million new members since 1997. A major reason private sector union membership keeps declining is because union jobs in the manufacturing sector keep getting eliminated by continuing de-industrialization.

Also in the same piece, Terzian asserts that AFL-CIO chief John Sweeney's

> dogged campaign to tie the fortunes of organized labor to the Democratic Party, in particular to transfer truckloads of (compulsory) dues... to the Democratic party... have not just irritated the 43 percent of union households that voted for George W. Bush last year, but have stirred dissent in official ranks.

Terzian misrepresents the cause of the rift. In fact, it was largely a turf war between heads of individual unions like the SEIU's Andrew Stern, who wanted to retain more of their own money for organizing new members, and Sweeney, who wanted to pool it centrally in the AFL-CIO's coffers. But, more important, the voting habits of union members needn't have any bearing on which politicians their unions support. Some union members may vote Republican because they oppose gay rights or gun control, but that's beyond the purview of the union itself. The union's job is to represent them not as gun-owners or churchgoers, but as workers. And, as workers, their interests are best served by the Democratic Party.

—Ben Adler

CIVIL WAR? WHATEVER: After spending months decrying any talk of withdrawing from a rapidly deteriorating Iraq, along comes General George Casey, the top American commander there, who, while mouthing the necessary caveats about "conditions" on the ground, floats the prospect of a major troop reduction next spring.

If the United States ends up withdrawing from Iraq even as chaos rages, the question arises: How will hawks maintain their unshakable claims that the war was justified and victory is inevitable? It's a difficult question, but, on July 29, we got an answer, courtesy of David Ignatius in *The Washington Post*. Ignatius's contention is that civil war—which, only months ago, hawks argued would never come about—wouldn't be the end of the argument:

> Pessimists increasingly argue that Iraq may be going the way of Lebanon in the 1970s. I hope that isn't so, and that Iraq avoids civil war. But people should realize that even Lebanonization wouldn't be the end of the story. The Lebanese turned to sectarian militias when their army and police couldn't provide security. But through more than 15 years of civil war, Lebanon continued to have a president, a prime minister, a parliament and an army. The country was on ice, in effect, while the sectarian battles raged. The national identity survived, and it came roaring back this spring in the Cedar Revolution that drove out Syrian troops.

In this blithe description, 15 years of carnage and atrocity followed by an additional 15 years of foreign domination was merely a prelude to the hopeful scenes of Martyrs' Square. (Hey, you need martyrs, right?) It's a debatable contention whether the "national identity" of Lebanon survived, though sectarian loyalty certainly deepened. What aren't debatable contentions are that 100,000 people didn't survive, another 900,000 were displaced, and one of the world's premier jihadist networks, Hezbollah, was born. These aren't footnotes, and I have a feeling that the participants in the Cedar Revolution would never dream of treating them as such.

So, yes, an Iraqi civil war really is the end of the debate about whether the decision to invade Iraq was justified. (As THE NEW REPUBLIC editorialized a year ago, "Iraq's political future could well be decided by guns rather than ballots. If another dictator murders his way to power, or the country dissolves into violent fiefdoms, the war will have proved not just a strategic failure, but a moral one as well.") Sure, something would follow a civil war, but our enterprise won't and shouldn't be judged by that far-distant outcome. Instead, it will and should be judged by the path that led, under U.S. auspices, to widespread sectarian violence.

—Spencer Ackerman

TNR REPORTER-RESEARCHER BEN ADLER AND ASSOCIATE EDITOR SPENCER ACKERMAN HAVE BEEN GUEST-BLOGGING &C. TO SEE MORE OF THEIR POSTS GO TO WWW.TNR.COM

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Public broadcasting abroad.

Bully Pulpit

BY FRANKLIN FOER

LAST FALL, A Bush-bashing ad in *The New York Times* included among its signatories the name of Norman Pattiz, the celebrated creator of Radio Sawa, a radio network fashioned to win hearts and minds in the Muslim world. This year, some say as a result of the ad, Pattiz has found himself battling for his seat on the Broadcasting Board of Governors (BBG), an independent government commission that oversees the Voice of America (VOA), Radio Free Europe/Radio Free Liberty, and Radio Sawa and its sister TV network, Alhurra. The commission, which consists of four Republicans and four Democrats, along with the secretary of state, has never before concerned itself with the extracurricular political activities of its members. "Democrats and Republicans found a way to agree with one another," says one longtime BBG participant, who spoke on the condition of anonymity. "It was David Broder's dream." So what happened?

The answer is Kenneth Y. Tomlinson. As chairman of the Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB), Tomlinson has spent the last two years living a conservative fantasy—making life hell for NPR and PBS. Most notoriously, Tomlinson commissioned a study showing public broadcasting to be riddled with liberal bias. (To be sure, the study took a rather expansive definition of liberalism, counting such heirs to Eugene McCarthy as the gun-loving pro-lifer Bob Barr.)

While these antics have spurred outraged op-eds and an inspector general's investigation, another Tomlinson scandal has gone largely unnoticed. For the last three years, Tomlinson has moonlighted as chairman of the BBG—which controls networks that are among the most important vehicles for public diplomacy. Given the rampant anti-Americanism in the world these days, that makes this job arguably more consequential than his rule over Oscar the Grouch and Garrison Keillor. Unfortunately, he hasn't treated the BBG with any greater gravitas. He has deployed a similar set of tactics: purging the bureaucracy of political enemies, zealously rooting out perceived "liberal bias," and generally politicizing institutions that have resisted ideological intrusions for decades. One of Tomlinson's fellow broadcasting governors told me, "In every story about the CPB, you could substitute BBG."

TOMLINSON ARRIVED AT the BBG in August of 2002, thanks, in no small measure, to the backing of his longtime buddy, Karl Rove. By all accounts, he was never inclined to join the BBG's festival of bipartisan bonhomie. When he had served as editor of *Reader's Digest*, he was as much a conservative activist as a journalist. In 1996, he quit the magazine world to work on Steve Forbes's presidential campaign. (*The Washington Post* described him as Forbes's "closest friend.") And he had served with Ed Meese and Robert Bork on the board of the American Civil Rights Union, an organization established in 1998 to counter the ACLU.

Indeed, his arrival instantly crushed the old ethos. Whereas the BBG once opened its meetings to the public, Tomlinson began restricting substantive discussions to executive sessions. Behind closed doors, his colleagues say, he set about restructuring the organization to minimize the power of individual commissioners (e.g., potentially obstreperous Democrats), insisting that he possessed the power to unilaterally hire and fire any staffer. When Robert M. Ledbetter, a Mississippi broadcaster nominated in 2003 at the behest of Trent Lott, joined with Democrats to stymie many of these changes, Tomlinson, according to past and current board members, blocked his reappointment.

Tomlinson has also focused on deposing staff that he considers to be Democratic sympathizers. Last winter, he prevailed in a lengthy battle to remove Bruce Sherman, the BBG's deputy executive director and author of Radio Sawa's strategic plan, from his post. According to Sherman's colleagues, Tomlinson suspected him of harboring a stealth political agenda. Myrna Whitworth, a former acting director of VOA, told me, "Tomlinson regards Sherman as a Democratic plant." Tomlinson has campaigned to remove other imagined enemies, such as Bert Kleinman, the head of Middle East Television Network, and Tom Dine, the respected longtime head of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty. (Dine has since announced that he is leaving his post.) "You've got a real culture of fear in the place," Whitworth told me.

Tomlinson's colleagues suspect him of despising Pattiz, his greatest internal enemy, for less high-minded reasons. Three governors who served with Tomlinson told me that the chairman couldn't stand last month's *Wall Street Journal* profile and other fawning attention Pattiz has received. But, colleagues say, Tomlinson zeroed in on his rival's political activities as grounds for the White House to block Pattiz. Pattiz's political patron, Senator Joseph Biden, hasn't accepted this fate. To voice his dissent, he briefly placed a hold on Dina Powell, President Bush's nominee for deputy undersecretary of state for public diplomacy.

WITH ALL THE machinations that have consumed the BBG, it's not surprising that Tomlinson's style has rubbed off on actual broadcast content. Under his reign, longtime civil servants have found themselves replaced by Republican ideologues. There's no better example than VOA Director David Jackson, who arrived via the Pentagon public affairs office. Reporters, editors, and producers at VOA

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insist that Jackson has pressured them to portray the administration favorably. These instances have been catalogued by Sanford Ungar, a former VOA director, in a *Foreign Affairs* essay, and by Carolyn Weaver, a VOA-TV reporter, in an e-mail to Jackson that I obtained. Their main complaint is Iraq coverage. Ungar writes: "Editors have repeatedly been asked to develop 'positive stories' emphasizing U.S. success in Iraq, rather than report car bombings and terrorist attacks." Jackson, for example, sent an e-mail urging reporters to cover restored cell phone service: "This story offers so many angles." (Like Tikrit's dirt-cheap friends and family rate.) VOA reporters also say that they have been asked to limit criticisms of the war. Management insisted on removing photos of prisoner abuse at Abu Ghraib from VOA's website. And, after U.S. forces raided Iraqi National Congress headquarters in the spring of 2004, Jackson chastised reporters for referring to Ahmed Chalabi as a "a favorite of the Pentagon."

Of course, VOA exists to make America's case to the world. But, in the Tomlinson era, VOA management has focused far more intently on burnishing the image of the Bush administration and the Republican Party—a task that falls outside the organization's ambit. Jackson, for instance, warned reporters not to dwell on "Bush-bashing" at last summer's Democratic National Convention. When a reporter produced a story on the diversity of Democratic delegates, the story was held. The reporter was told to wait until the Republican convention and write about both parties' diversity efforts then.

In the meantime, the BBG has descended into rancor. Democrats and staff call Tomlinson "paranoid" and describe his "angry outbursts." This ill will has come at a cost. Governors from both parties say squabbling has diverted attention from the development of a coherent strategy. For instance, the BBG can't develop a plan for capitalizing on the surprisingly large Muslim audiences captured by Sawa, because it wastes so much time debating Tomlinson's personnel moves. And there are larger issues to resolve. Mark Helmke, an aide to Senate Foreign Relations Chair Richard Lugar, bluntly criticized the BBG in a presentation to the Heritage Foundation last month: "The world has radically changed, but the institution supporting international broadcasting has not."

How bad is Tomlinson? His opponents told me that they couldn't wait for Karen Hughes to emerge from retirement and assume her new job as undersecretary of state for public diplomacy—a post potentially more powerful than Tomlinson's in devising strategy for the battle for hearts and minds. They hope that she will take her new mission seriously and won't abide the silly intramural fighting that now consumes the BBG—that even she will be disgusted by Tomlinson's power plays. "She's a relative pragmatist," a BBG member told me. In other words, the Democrats are banking on Bush's most fanatically loyal spinmeister to diminish Republican partisanship within the organization. Yes, it's that bad. ■

White House Watch

Source Code

BY RYAN LIZZA

HOURS BEFORE PRESIDENT BUSH announced his Supreme Court nominee, a White House reporter from a major daily newspaper was on the phone with one of "the four horsemen." The horsemen—former White House Counsel C. Boyden Gray, Reagan Attorney General Ed Meese, Federalist Society pooh-bah Leonard Leo, and Jay Sekulow, best known as Washington's most prominent Jew for Jesus—had earned their nickname because they were the four outsiders who worked most closely with the White House on the Supreme Court nomination. If anyone knew who Bush was about to pick, it would be one of them.

The reporter declined to identify which horseman he spoke with, but the source confidently provided the scribe with what seemed like confirmation of the scoop of the day—that Bush's choice was Edith Brown Clement. "He was talking about the pros and cons of Clement, and why it was such a brilliant pick," says the reporter.

Elsewhere in Washington, other "sources close to the White House" were also fanning the Clement flames. Up on the Hill, Senator John Cornyn, another self-styled Bush adviser wired into the White House, e-mailed reporters an embargoed statement praising Clement as an inspired choice.

The horsemen and Cornyn were obviously wrong about Clement, but the episode underscores how much reporters now rely on GOP operatives outside the White House to tell them what's going on inside of it. These sources and their ilk fed the frenzied, daylong speculation that Bush would pick Clement, and they now shape the coverage of every major White House story. Whether they are called "sources close to the White House" or "Bush advisers" or "GOP strategists familiar with White House thinking," their role in Washington is the same. They act as an essential lubricant in the daily clash between the White House and its press corps.

This is partly the White House's own fault. The Bush administration has promoted an explosion in the use of "sources close to the White House"—or SCTTWH. The phrase shows up in news databases more times for Bush's four and a half years than it does for the eight years of the Clinton presidency. This White House's stinginess with information has sent reporters scurrying to find knowledgeable outsiders, even if those sources don't always know what they're talking about. "They fill a vacuum," says Richard Wolffe, who covers the White House for *Newsweek*.

As a service to readers, and in an effort to demystify the anonymous source phenomenon, I asked 15 of the finest

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Bush White House reporters to help assemble a guide to the secret society of sources close to the White House. Despite the swelling ranks of SCTTWH, interviews revealed that there is indeed a core membership that might be called the Usual Suspects: a cadre of lobbyists, congressmen, ex-officials, and other hangers-on who seem to be programmed into every cell phone on the White House beat.

For reporters, they represent Washington's shadow White House, a place filled with slightly more accessible sources armed with dramatically less knowledge.

The Übersource

THE FIRST NAME to come rolling off the tongues of reporters when it comes to SCTTWH is Ed Gillespie. "He is the top guy I would put on that list," says a newspaper correspondent. Gillespie is Washington's omnipresent GOP operative. His core business is his multimillion-dollar lobbying firm, Quinn Gillespie, but he spins through the revolving door between the Bush world and K Street at a dizzying rate. Over the last few years, his lobbying career has been interrupted by stints on Bush's first campaign, as party chair, and, most recently, as a strategist working out of the West Wing on the John Roberts nomination.

Almost everyone agrees that, if the veil of anonymity were magically lifted from all White House coverage, Gillespie would be the single most frequently cited source close to the White House or a Bush adviser. He is a rare creature in Bush's Washington, someone genuinely close to the key players in the White House, as well as someone who talks regularly and semi-candidly with the press.

Notably, Gillespie's replacement as party chair, Ken Mehlman, is also a frequent nominee, although, having been raised in the hierarchical Rove machine rather than the more entrepreneurial Beltway culture that spawned Gillespie, Mehlman is regarded as more journalistically useless. Still, White House reporters say he is a top SCTTWH.

The Troika

NIPPING AT GILLESPIE'S heels for SCTTWH dominance are three Republican lobbyists: Charles Black, Ken Duberstein, and Vin Weber. Black, chairman of the lobbying firm BKSH and co-chairman of Civitas Group, which helps corporations extract homeland security dollars from Uncle Sam, is a pioneer in his field. He was a senior adviser to both Ronald Reagan and George H.W. Bush, but, more importantly, he is credited with destroying the stigma once attached to public servants who shift back and forth between politics and lobbying, clearing the path for the Ed Gillespies of today. When he is named, Black is alternatively described as "close to the Bush family," "an informal adviser to Bush," "a Republican strategist with close ties to the White House," and "a longtime Cheney friend." He has gained a reputation among some reporters as one of the few genuine SCTTWH willing to dollop out the occasional criticism.

Others disagree. "Black touches more bases than Duberstein does, but he's also singing from the choir book," says a White House wire reporter. Duberstein, Ronald Reagan's chief of staff and a regular SCTTWH in daily Bush coverage, is seen as less knowledgeable about the White House's inner workings, but quick with a quote. "He's perfect for attributing something that you already know," says one political reporter. "But, on the other hand, if Ken Duberstein told me Edith Clement was the choice, I would never go with it."

The final member of the troika is Vin Weber, who served a six-term stint in the House before launching his career as a lobbyist. Discreet and influential, he is the source close to the White House whom reporters are most likely to call for an outside perspective on how Bush's legislative agenda is faring. "He has a good sense of what the market will bear there," says a White House reporter, "a good sense of when the administration is pushing the Hill too far on an issue."

Hill Dwellers

WHITE HOUSE CORRESPONDENTS recently suffered a devastating loss. Representative Rob Portman was sworn in as the U.S. trade representative in May. Reporters agree that Portman was the most helpful SCTTWH in Congress. "Portman was as close as anyone else on the Hill to the White House," confirms one correspondent. Adds another, "Portman was the classic example" of a SCTTWH. With ties to several Bush aides that go back to his own days as a staffer in the first Bush administration—and a penchant for returning calls and speaking honestly to reporters—he was the king of the Hill for White House scribes.

A small sample of reporters nominate Cornyn as a replacement. "He's often at the White House and will often tell you he was there," explains a newspaper reporter. But that press release on Clement has severely damaged Cornyn's reputation as a budding SCTTWH. "He was duped," says the reporter. Adds another, "It's the perfect example of how he's close to the White House but not in the loop."

With Cornyn on the sidelines, there is no other member that has risen to the level of Usual Suspect. "It's not the leadership. It's not Hastert and DeLay," says a longtime White House reporter. "And Frist and his staff are much more yoked to the White House. They are more taking orders." The lack of a real Hill SCTTWH underscores the fact that Bush—unlike his father, who was famously chummy with members—is in fact not close to anyone on the Hill, as well as the fact that his White House has never made cultivating members a priority. "Does Bush have any genuine friends in the Congress?" asks Ed Chen, who covers the White House for the *Los Angeles Times*. "I'm not sure he does."

Ex-Bush Spokesbots

THE SECOND BUSH term has contributed to a rise in former officials dotting the Washington landscape, and reporters are lassoing them as they exit the White House. The same list of people is

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mentioned by numerous reporters and consists largely of former communications operatives who continue to talk to the press after they leave the campaign or the White House. Opinions about the value of each varies widely. At the top of the list are two former Bush campaign operatives: strategist Matthew Dowd and ad-maker Mark McKinnon. Dowd is generally seen as the more wired SCTTWH, his line to Karl Rove during the campaign having earned him a unique cachet. "Last year, Dowd was probably talking to Karl 17 times a day," says a reporter. But the fact that McKinnon exercises with the president is noted by several reporters, though critics dismiss the mountain-bike connection, claiming, "The circle has gotten big enough that [McKinnon] seems less plugged in."

Also in the top tier of former Bush officials likely to show up anonymously in your morning paper is Mary Matalin, who left her perch as a chief aide to Dick Cheney in December 2002. She receives fairly warm reviews from several reporters. Says a newsweekly correspondent, "She still talks. She is still very much on the circuit." A daily scribe adds, "Matalin is actually a really good one. She's a little more able to talk now that she doesn't work there. Still spewing the company line, but somewhat helpful." Such are the scraps that White House reporters have been reduced to coveting.

A click below these big names is Stuart Stevens, a former Bush ad-maker who is well-liked by the press and therefore suspect to Bush aides. "He is much more likely to say something zesty, although that is one of the reasons he is not in the inner, inner loop," explains a White House reporter.

Finally, there is a small faction of minor league ex-staffers who might sometimes claim to be close to the White House but who really aren't. "These are people who have to dine out for months on a single phone call. They are not in the real loop, but they once were," says the same reporter. In this group, White House reporters place former press aide Adam Levine, onetime Bush campaign spokesman Terry Holt, and former Bush spokesman Ari Fleischer. Shockingly, not a single reporter interviewed believes Fleischer is a true SCTTWH. Asked if Fleischer should be on the list of Usual Suspects, Chen simply responds, "No." A wire reporter adds, "If he knows stuff, it's because he asks, not because he's told. He's not in the inner circle and never was."

THE LONGER BUSH is in office, the more sources close to the White House there seem to be. The culture of fear that the Bushies have instilled in Republicans who speak ill of the administration—or who speak candidly—has forced more of them to hide behind veils of vague attribution. In fact, the epidemic has now migrated into the White House itself. At least one reporter recently granted a White House official the cover of a SCTTWH. Reporters say that this practice of officials inside the White House trying to disguise themselves as outsiders is becoming more common. Which means there's a whole new category of sources close to the White House: liars. ■

Paul Hackett's near-victory.

Army of One

BY MICHAEL CROWLEY

CINCINNATI, OHIO

HAS A LOSER ever looked so cocky? When Paul Hackett mounted a Cincinnati stage on Tuesday night, he had a DJ cue up Wild West music and then twirled and holstered an imaginary pistol for his delighted supporters, who cheered wildly. A clueless interloper would surely guess that this Iraq veteran–turned–Democratic hero had just triumphed in what was the most-hyped congressional special election in years. In fact, Hackett had just lost his race to Republican Jean Schmidt by a 48–52 margin. Flashing his self-assured smile at the back of the room, Hackett spotted a young female staffer in tears. "Knock off the cryin'!" he called out to her. "There's nothing to cry about here. This was a success. So let's *rock on*!"

A few months earlier, the lanky, handsome, 43-year-old Hackett had been a Marine serving in Falluja, Iraq. Then the local Republican representative, Rob Portman, left his seat to become U.S. trade representative. The race seemed hopeless for Democrats: The rural and exurban Cincinnati-area district gave Bush 64 percent of its vote in 2004 and hadn't sent a Democrat to Congress in over 30 years. But, as Hackett made an unexpectedly strong run for the seat, he became his party's hottest commodity since Barack Obama shot into orbit. The combination of his Iraq service and his defiant talk—Hackett openly called George W. Bush a "chicken hawk" and a "son of a bitch," and called the war in which he served "a misuse of the military"—made liberals swoon. *The New York Times* profiled him on page one, and the blogosphere raised some $500,000 for him in just a few weeks. Though he came up short, his showing on Tuesday night was, as *The Cincinnati Enquirer* put it, "nothing short of astounding."

Within hours, national Democrats were already spinning Hackett's close defeat as a sign that they are poised to win back Congress in 2006. Rahm Emanuel, chairman of the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee (DCCC), argues that "these are the early vibrations on the track." Hackett, he says, was just the sort of "change agent" that malcontented voters fed up with Bush, Iraq, and Washington corruption are looking for.

That may be true. But Democrats shouldn't assume a Hackett victory ordains a massive comeback for their party. His opponent was an uncharismatic, washed-up ex-state representative. And his candidacy combined two elements—his stirring Iraq service and the full firepower of the liberal blogosphere—in a way that few other Democrats will be able to replicate come fall of 2006.

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IT'S HARD TO underestimate how central Hackett's identity as an Iraq veteran was to his candidacy. Every piece of campaign literature I saw prominently featured a photograph of him in combat fatigues. In the days before the election, his campaign had a grizzled World War II vet named Butch cruise local roads in an old military Jeep, complete with a .30-caliber mounted machine gun and a VETERANS FOR HACKETT sign. The same went for Hackett's campaign appearances. During a grip-and-grin appearance outside a local GE aerospace plant, Hackett wore a PROUD TO HAVE SERVED pin as he shook workers' hands.

As his aides handed out flyers nearby, they cut straight to the chase: "Please vote for Paul Hackett. He just got back from Iraq." The impact of this one-liner was plain to see. The worn-out workers would emerge from their shifts with a disinterested look, until the I-word stopped them in their tracks. "Did he? Huh," replied one burly African American in a Bengals cap, studying Hackett's flyer. Others thanked him profusely for his service. Some were turned off by Hackett's Bush-bashing. But part of his appeal, one suspects, was that he never backed away from it. During a lull in his handshaking, Hackett stood under the blazing sun with his hands on his hips, looking gallant in gold-rimmed Ray-Bans. "That one guy, he came up to me and told me, 'I didn't like the way you called the president a chicken hawk. You can't say that.' I said, 'The hell I can't!' I asked him, 'Did you serve?' He says, 'No.' Figures. That's who I get that the most from, the guys who didn't serve."

This sort of thing made Hackett a rock star in the world of liberal blogs—a figure who combined the defiant rhetoric of Howard Dean with the military credentials of Max Cleland. Schmidt's campaign sniffed at Hackett's Web following. ("The second congressional district doesn't fully involve themselves in the blogosphere," a spokeswoman told me at Schmidt headquarters, as Rush Limbaugh trashed Hackett on a radio playing in the background.) But one need only look at the astounding numbers. Whereas the DCCC spent $200,000 on ads for Hackett, the campaign raised more than twice that much from online contributions. Most of that was thanks to the intense advocacy of a handful of liberal bloggers, several of whom traveled to southern Ohio from around the country and became a sort of informal arm of the campaign.

On Election Day, the bloggers' "war room" consisted of a dark corner of the Goldminers Inn, a dank dive bar in Batavia, Ohio, where four twentysomethings quaffed cans of Miller Lite and ruminated about their growing role in Democratic politics. The leader of the group was Bob Brigham, who blogs for a site called *Swing State Project*. After raising a six-figure sum for Hackett, Brigham had flown in from San Fancisco and "embedded" himself in the campaign, riding in Hackett's small convoy from event to event in baggy blue jeans and faded red canvas sneakers. "We're three times as relevant as the DCCC. And you can quote that!" he told me between sips of beer. "It's a sea change in Democratic politics. I see Al From and I see a hearse. This is the future. We're way ahead of the curve." Brigham proceeded to tell a strange tale, wherein Donnie Fowler, a onetime candidate for chairman of the Democratic National Committee, allegedly threw a punch at him. Did it land? "Hell, no! I'm virtual!" The spirit of the Dean campaign was alive and well.

Whether this spirit means a 2006 Democratic sweep is another matter. While the bloggers who sustained Hackett are certainly around for the long haul, the midsummer timing of the race allowed liberals to focus on Hackett's campaign with an intensity that won't be possible when dozens of other races are competing for attention in the November 2006 midterms. And, while Democrats are trying to scare up more Iraq veterans to run next year, the list is likely to be a short one.

WHICH MAY NOT be all bad. It's not easy running political neophytes for office, as the Hackett experience suggests. For all his seemingly ideal qualities, Hackett chafed at essential parts of the campaign process. The marriage between Hackett and his broader fan base, for instance, sometimes seemed an uneasy one. On the Monday before the election, Brigham convinced Hackett to make a guest appearance on the militantly liberal website *Daily Kos*. The candidate sat with him in a darkened restaurant, squinting quizzically at Brigham's laptop. At one point, after Brigham relayed some slangy reader commentary, Hackett turned to him and deadpanned, military style: "Translate." It seemed that some of *Daily Kos*'s more paranoid readers wanted proof that it was really Hackett posting. Hackett rolled his eyes. "What do they want, my Social Security number?" Then he dictated to Brigham at the keyboard: "It's me. Quit being a typical Democrat and get off my ass." Inevitably, someone took offense: "If exercizing [*sic*] critical thinking skills and healthy skepticism makes me a 'typical Democrat,' I'm proud to be one," harrumphed one reader.

Nor did Hackett seem to enjoy the onrush of national press as much as some career politicians might. At one point, when he turned from a conversation to find two reporters taking notes a couple of feet away, he said, only half-jokingly, "Don't you guys ever go away?" By Election Day, the half-joking part was gone. On Tuesday afternoon, he sat in a stairwell, his shirt soaked from 95-degree heat, talking to a CNN Radio reporter on his cell phone. "What, specifically, would you like to know? That covers a lot of topics," Hackett snapped in response to some unknown question. When the connection grew garbled, Hackett shouted into the phone—"Hello? Hello? *Hello!*"—then hung up in disgust before stalking past a mortified press aide to his car and driving away.

In the end, some people around Hackett wondered if all the attention—stories on ABC, NBC, Fox, CNN, the *Times*, *The Washington Post*, not to mention all the blog mania—wasn't spooking him. In the last two days of the election, Hackett skipped several opportunities to battle for a few

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last votes. Instead of nonstop stumping on Election Day, he took an unscheduled rest at home. And, the night before the election, as Schmidt raced around to diners and IHOPs, Hackett took in a Bruce Springsteen concert. What gave? "I expected that everyone would get excited and charged up about an Iraqi war vet," he told me just after delivering his concession speech. "I was a little surprised by the volume [of attention], particularly in the last week or so."

At his after-party on Tuesday night, Hackett's supporters were already looking ahead to next year, when Schmidt's new seat will be up again, and chanting, "'06! '06!" Hackett sounded open to it. And, if he runs, he may prevail. But that doesn't mean the Democrats will. ■

Attacking Iran is a bad idea.

Strike Out

BY MICHAEL J. MAZARR

With the recent election of arch-conservative Tehran Mayor Mahmoud Ahmadinejad as president of Iran, many observers expected a renewed crisis over Iran's nuclear program. And, sure enough, one has arrived with Iran's announcement that it intends to restart its uranium-conversion facility at Isfahan, despite an earlier agreement with European negotiators to keep its nuclear program frozen. The three EU countries negotiating with Iran have accelerated plans to deliver a new grand bargain on nuclear issues, offering trade, aid, and a nonaggression pact in exchange for denuclearization. But Iran has hinted that it knows the substance of the offer and isn't impressed. "It is we who should impose conditions on them, and not they on us," Ahmadinejad has said.

At any moment, Iran could withdraw from the talks, move beyond the Isfahan declaration to restart its enrichment program, or take some other action that would generate a global crisis. The European Union and the United States would take the matter to the Security Council and impose sanctions; Iran would dig in and fulminate about Yankee imperialism. And the Bush administration would then confront the most profound national security decision of its tenure—whether to launch limited air strikes on Iran's nuclear facilities. On this question, the conventional wisdom is clear: If need be, the United States could strike Iran's nuclear infrastructure without ruinous consequences. The Iranians are pragmatists and realists, the argument goes; they know when to take their medicine. Air strikes would represent a low-risk, intermediate response—after economic sanctions and before regime change—to continued Iranian nuclear ambitions.

Many observers of the Iranian nuclear issue seem to hold these views. As Franklin Foer catalogued in these pages ("Identity Crisis," December 20, 2004), conservative writers like Charles Krauthammer, Gary Schmitt, and Reuel Marc Gerecht have referred to a preemptive strike as, in Gerecht's phrasing, the "only option that offers a good chance of delaying Iran's production of nuclear weapons." In a recent *Atlantic* magazine–hosted war game on Iran, the consensus was that the United States could get away with limited attacks. For their part, President Bush and Vice President Cheney have separately insisted that diplomacy is the right way to handle the nuclear issue—but warned that, if diplomacy does not work, "all options are on the table."

When skeptics of strikes do talk about Iranian retaliation, it's of a limited sort: moves to deepen the instability in Iraq, further repression of reformists at home. The idea that Tehran would inaugurate a final showdown with the Great Satan seems too remote to contemplate. But contemplate it we must, because the conventional wisdom is wrong. Iranian leaders would have very real reasons to respond to "surgical" strikes with an all-out assault on U.S. interests designed to provoke the sort of decisive clash that everyone assumes Iran wants to avoid. And the resulting conflict would have far worse consequences for the United States than Iran's ability to create weapons-grade nuclear material.

One reason to believe that Tehran might respond violently, it turns out, is that they have said as much—again and again, in fairly unambiguous terms. Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei recently promised to "wear battle fatigues and be ready to sacrifice myself at the head of the nation." Revolutionary Guards Commander Mohammad Zolqadr has threatened destruction of Gulf oil production in response to U.S. strikes; Defense Minister Ali Shamkhani said, in August of 2004, that Iran would "consider any strike against our nuclear installations as an attack on Iran as a whole, and we will retaliate with all our strength." Ahmadinejad has fumed about Iranian nuclear concessions and boasted that "a popular and fundamentalist government will quickly change that," confident that "no country, no matter how powerful they are, can attack Iran."

Such bluster is usually dismissed as saber rattling. But this assumes that the only sensible Iranian response to U.S. attacks is restraint—when, in fact, a strong argument can be made that its best strategy would be to lash out. To understand why, we need to see the strategic situation as it might look from Tehran, and especially to the hard-liners who now dominate its government.

Begin with two assumptions that an Iranian strategist might well make. First, Iran's nuclear program must

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continue—slowly, perhaps covertly, but continue nonetheless. Second, the United States (in league with Israel) is determined both to end that nuclear program and to dominate the greater Middle East. Typical were the comments of Foreign Minister Kamal Kharrazi, who, in 2002, said that the United States was planning to invade Iraq to impose its "hegemony on the whole region and its resources." The Stanley Foundation recently concluded that, after five years of interviews with Iranian officials and scholars, many in Iran today fear that the United States "has never accepted the idea of an Islamic Republic and never will."

Given such views—and also given the intense pride, regional ambitions, and sense of cultural superiority characteristic of the Iranian mindset—hard-liners in Tehran continue to see their two leading responsibilities as defending the Islamic Republic and thwarting U.S. ambitions. A sense of fatalism broods deep within both Iranian culture and radical Islam—the fear that world forces, led by evil cabals, are conspiring to destroy Iranians and Muslims. For hard-line Iranian strategists, then, the question is not whether to choose a war with the United States. A conflict is all but inevitable. The question, instead, is whether Iran picks the battles or allows the Americans to do so. And choosing the battle on Iran's terms could mean choosing it now: It makes far more sense to fight an overextended, exhausted, nearly bankrupt, internationally unpopular United States today than a possibly rested, rejuvenated, more militarily flexible enemy in the future. If Iranian leaders are indeed thinking along these lines, a limited U.S. air strike would simply invite them to manufacture a decisive engagement. The longer Iran waits, on the other hand, the worse its position might become.

We need to keep in mind, too, what we mean when we talk about "Iranian reactions." Iran's government has been a crazy quilt of competing factions and power centers, with hard-line groups like the Iranian Revolutionary Guards Corps and conservatives in the parliament owning most elements of state power. To imagine an intemperate response to U.S. strikes, we don't need to presume that all Iranian leaders would endorse it—only that the most radical ones would. On their own, they have the ability to stage a sweeping retaliation, regardless of what pragmatic conservatives or reformers might want.

The election of Ahmadinejad has now delivered the last major state organ to the conservatives—and, even among hard-liners, Ahmadinejad stands out. One of the original student revolutionaries in 1979 and later a senior Revolutionary Guards officer, he has promised to oppose Western "decadence." His supporters have a specific agenda. As one of them told *The Washington Post*, "I picked Ahmadinejad to slap America in the face."

INFORMED BY SUCH thinking, Iran's leaders could decide to respond to U.S. air strikes with an elaborate, ferocious, global provocation designed to draw the United States into a protracted conflict. Iran could expand financial and other support to Hezbollah and other terrorist groups and encourage new attacks on Israel designed to wreck the fragile momentum toward peace with the Palestinians. It could activate agents and cells it has been developing inside Iraq to destabilize the country, tie down U.S. forces, and disrupt the supply lines necessary to enter Iran from the west in the event of a ground war. "If Iran wanted," Iraq's Deputy Foreign Minister Hamid Al Bayati said in February, "it could make Iraq a hell for the United States."

Meanwhile, with its limited air and naval assets, Iran could strike at U.S. military forces throughout the region. Tehran's regular military has aging equipment—but, as the Center for Strategic and International Studies' military expert Anthony Cordesman pointed out in a December 2004 analysis, the Revolutionary Guards represent a more skilled military-within-a-military, with ground forces, naval units, missiles, and other forces under its command; a leadership composed of die-hard conservatives; and a mission to protect the Islamic Revolution at all costs. The Guards could flood thousands of troops in small units across the porous border with Iraq with orders to link up with Iranian cells or insurgent groups and assault U.S. bases and forces. Meanwhile, Iran could launch as many of its missiles as possible at Iraqi cities, U.S. air bases, and U.S. allies on the Arabian peninsula.

Iran could also strike boldly at world oil supplies, disrupting traffic in the Strait of Hormuz—through which 15 million barrels of oil flow daily—with air and naval attacks. According to Cordesman, for example, Iran is believed to have more than 2,000 naval mines, some of them very modern, and the potential to deploy them from either large mine-laying ships or hundreds of smaller craft. Iran could hit Saudi Arabia, and its oil production, directly—including the huge export terminals at Ras Tanura and Ras Juaymah. Combined with an end to Iran's own oil exports (of three to four million barrels a day), these attacks would send the world economy into a tailspin.

Iran could then trigger the special international units of the Revolutionary Guards—the so-called "Quds" forces. They reportedly have a large secret budget, officers working out of many Iranian embassies, and strong links with organizations in areas ranging from Iraq, Afghanistan, and Pakistan to Turkey, Europe, and North America. This organization could generate a wave of terrorist attacks against U.S. embassies, military bases, companies, and allies all over the globe.

Faced with the indefinite disruption of the international system and widespread attacks on its forces and interests—and perhaps its homeland as well—the United States might be forced to intervene with ground forces, with the goal of regime change. Gathering the concentrated forces necessary for a large-scale move into Iran would take months—time during which oil prices would continue to surge, world economic growth would continue to stall, and Iranian-sponsored terrorists would continue to hit U.S. targets. Washington would have to draw every available Army and Marine unit not already in Iraq, as well as many naval and

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air assets, into the region for an Iranian campaign; the global U.S. military presence would be essentially on hold until the conflict ended.

Once the invasion did begin, the Iranians could rely on their rugged terrain to hold up U.S. forces in the mountain ranges that run along the western corridor of the country. Tehran could also disperse its military into small units, marshal the efforts of millions of members of its civilian militias, and undertake an arduous guerrilla campaign. A military analyst based in Tehran told a Western reporter in early 2005 that Iran had spent the past year developing "their tactics of 'asymmetrical' war, which would aim not at resisting a penetration of foreign forces," but instead at waging a guerrilla campaign once the Americans had arrived. Tehran could generate a rebellion many times more destructive, and more legitimate in the eyes of its people, than the one in Iraq.

To be sure, lashing out carries major risks for Iran: It would place the physical security of the country and regime in danger. But many Iranian leaders may believe that their power is already at risk and might see U.S. air strikes as confirmation that a final reckoning is at hand.

If, on the other hand, Iran sits back and absorbs an attack, tough-minded thinkers in Tehran are likely to argue, Washington will believe that it can assault Iran at will. Many Iranians (not just hard-liners) would see a passive response as weak, cowardly, and unbefitting a proud people. Persian culture has a strong tradition of glorious defeat in service of a sacred cause. If we offer the hard-liners a chance to martyr themselves in the name of cultural heroism, they might just take us up on it.

Comparing the Iranian and North Korean cases is instructive. The reason the military option seems nonsensical in Korea is not because it wouldn't work (though that might be true). It's because of the North's presumed reaction, which would be to destroy Seoul. In the Iranian case, the opposite assumption seems to be in play—that Iran has no similarly catastrophic responses available to it. But that assumption is based as much on hope and wishful thinking as on any form of analysis.

A WAR AGAINST TEHRAN and its allies in the Islamic world would pose an even greater threat to U.S. national interests than a continued Iranian nuclear program—at least one under International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) inspections, and one in which the Iranians publicly reject the idea of building bombs. The proposed EU deal aims to halt Iran's uranium-enrichment program but not all of its civilian nuclear activities—Iran would be allowed to operate its reactors and conduct other research under international supervision. Even if a small part of Iran's enrichment program continued, it could be limited to civilian purposes by inspections, including short-notice challenge visits under the IAEA's so-called "additional protocol." There is some evidence that Iran is amenable to such terms—that the sticking point is not inspections as much as preserving the sovereign right to a civilian nuclear fuel cycle.

Such a fuel cycle need not present a military threat, assuming strict inspections. To get from there to a bomb, Tehran would either have to build a parallel, secret enrichment program or rashly toss out the IAEA regime. The first route would be slow and risky; the second would clearly demonstrate that Iran sought nuclear weapons and trigger an international crisis that would leave Tehran confronting not just the United States, but also the combined weight of world opinion. Either way, the risk isn't immediate: According to a report this week in *The Washington Post*, the latest U.S. National Intelligence Estimate puts an Iranian bomb at least a decade away.

An Iran under IAEA watch would possess a nuclear program but no significant bomb-making capability. Tehran's hard-liners could claim a victory and begin hinting about a "virtual" nuclear deterrent but would know that, if they deployed an open arsenal—or, worse, gave fissile material to terrorists—they would likely face every ounce of "shock and awe" that Washington could muster.

Reducing Tehran's nuclear program to a latent, ambiguous capability would achieve basic U.S. interests: no public, tested, clearly weaponized Iranian arsenal; too little fissile material in Iranian hands to allow Tehran to give much away (and enormous dangers to its regime if it did so); and a reaffirmation of the basic IAEA system of inspections. Meanwhile, this process could lay the groundwork for the only long-term solution to the problem of Iranian nuclear aspirations: integration into the world economy and a gradual return to reform.

Ahmadinejad is hardly a reformer and reportedly favors socialist-style government planning to deal with his country's manifold economic problems. But most Iranians still want reform. Ahmadinejad's support seems to have come from conservative voter turnout drives and his populist appeal to widespread anger at economic stagnation, lack of opportunity, and corruption in Tehran. When his state-run, autarkic economic program fails, the same demands that ushered him into power will prove his undoing—if the West doesn't gift-wrap a nationalist rallying cry for him in the meantime.

Engaging an autocratic regime in order to buy a tentative cap on its nuclear ambitions and hoping that political reforms will outpace bomb-making are hardly neat and tidy solutions or ones likely to warm the hearts of those who crave bold statements of U.S. global supremacy. But we Americans are always seeing the world as a series of problems to be solved rather than challenges to be managed. Impatience with Iran is likely to become self-defeating; patience, meanwhile, offers no guarantee of success. It remains, however, the best option we have. ■

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Benefits without bankruptcy.

The New New Deal

BY NIALL FERGUSON AND LAURENCE J. KOTLIKOFF

PRESIDENT BUSH'S Social Security proposal looks to be dead in the water—and a good thing, too. The plan was half-baked and fiscally irresponsible. The American public took one look and realized it provided neither personal nor national financial security. Even many Republican congressmen didn't buy it. So much for the president's post-election political capital.

For their part, the Democrats are quietly exultant. Their Nancy Reagan–inspired strategy—"Just say no!"—has helped stymie the president. It looks like a classic victory for the political opposition.

Yet, as Bob Dylan wisely observed in "Just Like Tom Thumb's Blues," "[N]egativity don't pull you through." Sure, it may work as a short-term political strategy. But, in the long term, it won't save the United States from the very real fiscal crisis it faces. Just because the president's proposal deserved to be junked doesn't mean there isn't a fiscal problem that urgently needs addressing.

Consider what happens if we allow the status quo to continue: Either (a) government deficits reach an intolerable size in the eyes of financial markets, forcing a sudden collapse of the system via spiraling interest rates; (b) the proportion of income that has to be taken from the young (i.e., people who enter the workforce in the years ahead) and given to the old (those who have retired) rises to a point at which the young have to use literally all of their after-tax savings to purchase government bonds and, thus, are unable to accumulate physical capital; or (c) the United States becomes so dependent on foreign capital to finance investment and consumption that the U.S. capital stock becomes foreign-owned and all income from capital flows abroad.

Unless they believe in the Leninist principle—"the worse, the better"— Democrats need to come up with a better strategy than just waiting for one of these things to happen to Republicans. Instead of being relentlessly negative, Democrats need to recognize the magnitude of the problem we face and come up with some credible solutions of their own, sooner rather than later. What we have in mind is a new New Deal—a combination of fundamental Social Security reform, health care reform, and tax reform. A new New Deal could help Democrats win the voters they failed to persuade last November. It could also help a Democratic administration deal with our country's immense demographic and fiscal problems.

FIRST THE DEMOGRAPHICS. According to U.N. projections, male life expectancy in the United States will rise from 75 to 80 between now and 2050 (it was 66 back in 1950 and even lower when Social Security was invented). The share of the American population that is 65 or over is set to rise from 12.3 percent to 20.6 percent.

In 25 years, when almost all 77 million members of the baby-boomer cohort have retired, we'll have twice the number of elderly, but only 18 percent more workers to pay their benefits. The entire country will look, feel, and be a lot older than present-day Florida. By 2050, we will have as many *old* old (85 and over) people as the current populations of New York, Los Angeles, and Chicago, and as many centenarians as there are people in Washington, D.C.

Meanwhile, the United Nations also projects that the total fertility rate (births per woman) may fall below two in the next decade, and it could be as low as 1.85 in 20 years. Immigration will only partially compensate for these trends. Taken together, they mean that the elderly dependency ratio (the ratio of the population 65 years or older to the population 15 to 64) could very nearly double over the next 45 years, from 0.18 to 0.33.

This is bound to put a major strain on our current systems that help Americans provide for retirement and cope with the ill health that comes with old age—systems designed in the distant days of Franklin Roosevelt and Lyndon Johnson. But, in trying to modify the Social Security system, President Bush was only chipping away at the tip of an iceberg. The things he was worried about—the future deficits of the Social Security system, forecast to start in 2018, and the exhaustion of the Social Security Trust Fund (its stock of government bonds) in around 2042—are not, in reality, the biggest fiscal problems facing the United States.

Social Security has been reformed before. In the 1980s, the payroll tax was raised slightly and a gradual increase in the retirement age was introduced (it is scheduled to rise to 67 by 2027). One option might be simply to do more of the same. But that's not what the president proposed. He want-

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ed to give workers the chance to divert some of their Social Security contributions into individual retirement accounts, while indexing the value of the future Social Security checks for middle-class and higher earners to inflation instead of wages.

There were four problems with this. First, diverting money into individual accounts would have turned the Republican line on Social Security into a self-fulfilling prophecy, pushing the system into deficit much sooner than would happen otherwise. Second, individual accounts would have done away with one of the biggest advantages of a state pension system, namely economies of scale and reduced risk. (It's a sobering thought that Jeremy Siegel of the Wharton School—as the author of *Stocks for the Long Run*, the equity sell-side's favorite academic—is now predicting a stock market slump as baby boomers sell off their portfolios to finance year-round vacations and plastic surgery.) Third, as a consequence, the president's scheme would have made an already bad position even worse for younger Americans, making them reliant on a risky, costly, and inadequate private-account alternative. Finally, and most importantly, it would have done nothing to address the much deeper fiscal imbalance between all the projected revenues of our government and all its existing commitments—not just Social Security, but a whole raft of other nondiscretionary expenditures, of which the Medicare system is by far the biggest.

TODAY, SOCIAL SECURITY, Medicare, and Medicaid benefits per retiree total $21,000. Multiply this by the current 36 million elderly, and you see why these programs currently account for half of federal tax revenue. Over the past four years, the Medicare benefits per beneficiary have grown 16 times faster than the real wages of the workers paying those benefits. Medicaid benefits per head have grown almost as fast. And, if you think that growth in health spending will slow any time soon, think again. The new and fabulously expensive Medicare benefit enacted in 2003 by the Bush administration is just about to kick in.

The best way to measure the overall problem is simply to compare the present value of all projected future government expenditures—including debt-service payments—with the present value of all projected future government receipts, and then work out the difference. The latest estimate of this fiscal gap is a colossal $65.9 trillion. This figure comes courtesy of two distinguished economists—Jagadeesh Gokhale and Kent Smetters—who based their analysis on our government's own, quite optimistic, projections.

Of course, $65.9 trillion is a pretty hard number to grasp. But that is the implicit public debt of the United States—a sum five times larger than U.S. gross domestic product and over 14 times the size of the national debt held by the public. Gokhale and Smetters's study also lets us answer some simple questions: What alternative tax hikes or expenditure cuts would be needed to eliminate this fiscal gap? The answers are guaranteed to terrify politicians. One way would be immediately and permanently to double personal and corporate income taxes. A second option would be immediately and permanently to cut by two-thirds all Social Security and Medicare benefits. A third alternative (which would not quite close the gap) would be immediately and permanently to cut all federal discretionary spending.

The obvious point is that there is no conceivable political way to do any of these things. A politician who suggested even a mixture of the three would be as dead as David Stockman was when he suggested that Ronald Reagan cut benefits to retirees by a third. The American Association of Retired Persons exists to ensure that not one of Social Security's 2,025 increasingly anachronistic benefit provisions is changed.

So, Houston—or, rather, Washington—we really do have a problem: a truly grave demographic, fiscal, and economic problem. It's a problem that Bush inherited, but one he has done nothing to make better and much to make worse. We refer here to the president's three major tax cuts, his major increase in discretionary spending, his major expansion of entitlement programs, and his massive deficits. And that was just the first term.

SO WHAT'S THE alternative? The program we outline below aims at both efficiency and fairness. Unlike other solutions on offer, it is holistic; that is, it embraces Social Security reform, health care reform, and tax reform. And it is based on four fundamental principles we think most Democrats—indeed, most Americans—would subscribe to:

(1) The federal fiscal system should be moderately progressive. In other words, the net effect of all federal programs taken together should be to reduce somewhat the inequalities of income that are inherent in any market-based economy, but not in such a way that economic efficiency is compromised and growth lowered.
(2) There should be a system of universal health care—so that no American is denied necessary medical treatment—but the system should also be affordable.
(3) When they stop working, all Americans should be guaranteed a basic income of at least 40 percent of their pre-retirement earnings (the original goal of the Social Security system).
(4) The federal fiscal system should be based on the principle of intergenerational equity; that is to say, net lifetime taxes should take out of our children's income roughly the same proportion as they take out of our income.

These principles are important because our new New Deal has several components—a federal sales tax, individual retirement accounts, and health care vouchers. The plan we envision is not only market-based and economically efficient, but it is also moderately progressive and generationally equitable. It's simple and transparent, too—the

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very opposite of the status quo. Taken together, our proposals would not only modernize Social Security, provide universal health care coverage, and overhaul the tax system. They would also eliminate most of the fiscal gap described above, improve the well-being of the poor, enhance incentives to work and to save, raise the nation's rate of saving and domestic investment, and stimulate economic growth.

The three proposals covering taxes, Social Security, and health care are interconnected and interdependent. In particular, tax reform provides the funding needed to finance Social Security and health care reform. It also ensures that the rich and middle-class elderly pay their fair share in resolving our fiscal gap.

Tax Reform

Let's start with tax reform. Our plan here is to replace the personal income tax, the corporate income tax, the payroll (FICA) tax, and the estate and gift taxes with a federal retail sales tax (FRST), plus a rebate. The tax would work just like the sales taxes currently levied in many states, though at a higher rate. The rebate would be paid monthly to households, based on the household's demographic composition, and would be equal to the sales taxes paid, on average, by households at the federal poverty line with the same demographics.

Most Democrats assume that a sales tax would be bound to be regressive. But our version has three clearly progressive elements. First, thanks to the rebate, poor households would pay no sales taxes in net terms. Second, our reform would eliminate the highly regressive FICA tax, which is levied only on the first $90,000 of earnings. Third, FRST would effectively tax wealth as well as wages, because, when the rich spend their wealth and when workers spend their wages, they would both pay sales taxes.

The tax would be highly transparent and efficient. It would save hundreds of billions of dollars in tax compliance costs. And it would reduce the effective marginal taxes facing most Americans when they work and save.

FRST would also enhance generational equity by asking rich and middle-class older Americans to pay taxes when they spend their wealth. The poor elderly, living on Social Security, would end up better off. They would receive the sales tax rebate even though the purchasing power of their Social Security benefits would remain unchanged (thanks to an automatic adjustment that would raise their Social Security benefits to account for the increase in the retail price level).

The sales tax would be levied on *all* final-consumption goods and services. Its tax rate would be set at 33 percent—high enough to cover the costs of the new New Deal's Social Security and health care reforms as well as meet the government's other spending needs. This rate sounds high compared with an income tax in part because of the way sales taxes are levied. Earning a dollar and having to pay 33 cents in taxes when you spend it leaves you with only 75 cents of consumption, because 75 cents multiplied by 1.33 equals $1. The effect is the same as if you earn a dollar and pay a 25 percent income tax, which also leaves you with 75 cents of consumption. So a 33 percent sales tax is actually equivalent to a 25 percent income tax.

Put in these terms, a 33 percent sales tax is actually not very high. Indeed, if you add up the personal income, corporate income, and FICA taxes that households pay, either directly or indirectly, you find out that the vast majority face combined average and marginal direct tax rates above 25 percent. Will taxing consumption rather than income reduce spending and put the economy in recession? No, it will shift spending away from consumption goods and services to investment goods, which will help the economy grow through time. As today's China and yesterday's Japan show, economies that shift from consuming to saving and investment can achieve tremendous performance.

Social Security Reform

Our second proposed reform deals with Social Security. We would shut down the retirement portion of the current Social Security system at the margin by paying in the future only those retirement benefits that were accrued by the time of the reform. This means that current retirees would receive their full benefits, but workers would receive benefits based only on their covered wages prior to the date of the reform. The retail sales tax would pay off all accrued retirement benefits, which eventually would equal zero. The current Social Security survivor and disability programs would remain unchanged, except that their benefits would be paid by the sales tax.

In place of the existing Social Security retirement system, we would establish the Personal Security System (PSS)—a system of individual accounts, but one with very different properties from the scheme that was proposed by the president. All workers would be required to pay 7.15 percent of their wages up to what is now the Social Security–covered earnings ceiling (i.e., they would contribute what is now the employee FICA payment) into an individual PSS account. Married or legally partnered couples would share contributions so that each spouse's or partner's account would receive the same amount. The government would contribute to the accounts of the unemployed and disabled. In addition, the government would make matching contributions on a progressive basis to workers' accounts, thereby helping the poor to save.

All PSS accounts would be private property. But they would be administered and invested by the Social Security Administration in a market-weighted global index fund of stocks, bonds, and real-estate securities. Consequently, everyone would have the same portfolio and receive the same rate of return. The government would guarantee that, at retirement, the account balance would equal at least what the worker had contributed, adjusted for inflation—i.e., the

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government would guarantee that workers could not lose what they contributed. This would protect workers from the inevitable downside risks of investing in capital markets.

Between the ages of 57 and 67, account balances would be gradually sold off each day by the Social Security Administration and exchanged for inflation-protected annuities that would begin paying out at age 62. By age 67, workers' account balances would be fully annuitized. Workers who died prior to 67 would bequeath their account balances to their spouses, partners, or children.

Under our plan, unlike the president's, neither Wall Street nor the insurance industry would get its hands on workers' money. There would be no loads, no commissions, no fees. Nor would there be all the risks associated with individual investing. This is because PSS would continue to take advantage of the overwhelming advantages enjoyed by all state systems of social insurance: economies of scale and reduction of risk through government guarantee.

Health care Reform

Our third and final reform deals not just with our public health care programs, Medicare, and Medicaid, but with the private health insurance system as well. That system notoriously leaves some 45 million Americans uninsured. Our reform would abolish the existing fee-for-service Medicare and Medicaid programs and enroll all Americans in a universal health insurance system called the Medical Security System (MSS). Every October, the MSS would provide each American with an individualized voucher to be used to purchase health insurance for the following calendar year. The size of the voucher would depend on the recipients' expected health expenditures over the calendar year. Thus, a 75-year-old with colon cancer would receive a very large voucher, say $150,000, while a healthy 30-year-old might receive a $3,500 voucher. The MSS would have access to all medical records concerning each American and set the voucher level each year based on that information.

Some are sure to feel uneasy about this proposal, since it seems to imply an invasion of privacy. Yet the government already knows about millions of Medicare and Medicaid participants' health conditions, because it is paying their medical bills. This information has never, to our knowledge, been inappropriately disclosed.

The vouchers would pay for basic inpatient and outpatient medical care, prescription medications, and long-term care over the course of each year. If you ended up costing the insurance company more than the amount of your voucher, the insurance company would make up the difference. If you ended up costing the company less than the voucher, the company would pocket the difference. Insurers would be free to market additional services at additional costs. MSS would, at long last, promote healthy competition in the insurance market, which would go a long way toward restraining health care costs.

The beauty of our plan is that all Americans would receive health care coverage and that the government could limit its total voucher expenditure to what the nation could afford. Unlike the current fee-for-service system, under which the government has no control of the bills it receives, MSS would explicitly limit its liability.

The plan is also progressive. The poor, who are more prone to illness than the rich, would receive higher vouchers, on average, than the rich. And, because we would be eliminating the current income tax system, all the tax breaks going to the rich in the form of nontaxed health insurance premium payments would vanish. Added together, the elimination of this roughly $150 billion of tax expenditures, the reduction in the costs of hospital emergency rooms (which are currently subsidized out of the federal budget), and the abolition of the huge subsidies to insurers in the recent Medicare drug bill would provide a large part of the additional funding needed for MSS to cover the entire population.

Eliminating the Fiscal Gap

A 33 percent federal retail sales tax rate would generate federal revenue equal to 21 percent of GDP—the same proportion the Treasury collected in 2000. Currently, federal revenues equal 16 percent of GDP. So we are talking here about a tax hike equivalent to 5 percent of GDP. But we believe such a hike is both necessary for the country's long-term fiscal stability and, in the form outlined above, neutral—if not positive—in its macroeconomic impact. The new New Deal also implies some major long-run spending cuts. First, Social Security would be paying only its accrued benefits over time, which is trillions of dollars less than its projected benefits, when measured in present value. Second, we would be putting a lid on the growth of health care expenditures. Limiting excessive growth in these expenditures will, over time, make up for the initial increase in federal health care spending arising from MSS's move to universal coverage. Third, we would reduce federal discretionary spending by one-fifth, reversing the Bush administration's spending splurge. Taken together, these very significant tax hikes and spending cuts would, we believe, eliminate most if not all of our nation's fiscal gap.

The old New Deal is all but dead. It and the Great Society programs of the 1960s are being inexorably killed by demographic changes that their architects could not have foreseen. Keeping them on life support is not an option; it merely prolongs their death agonies. But our new New Deal offers a viable way to achieve social and generational equity through affordable programs of public pensions and health care that yoke the dynamism of the free market to the great cause of social justice. And our new New Deal represents the best chance of the Democrats getting back into power. ■

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BOOKS & THE ARTS

STANLEY KAUFFMANN ON FILMS

Style as Meaning

GUS VAN SANT IS UNIQUE in America. Most of his eleven films would seem to be caviar to the general, so remote from conventional film-making that they don't even seem to be attacking convention. They simply exist in themselves and as themselves. Yet he has so many admirers that big bow-wow backers continue to support him. His new film, **LAST DAYS,** though wrapped in Van Santism, was co-produced by HBO. As a further anomaly, he has sometimes plunged into the conventional: *Good Will Hunting* even got some Oscar nominations. Yet this is the director whose *Gerry* consisted of two men wandering around in a desert for 103 minutes and whose *My Own Private Idaho* transmuted some Falstaff-Hal scenes from *Henry IV* into an encounter between a drugged-out American male hooker and a rich kid.

LAST DAYS
(Picturehouse)

TONY TAKITANI
(Strand)

There is supposed to be an unbridgeable gap between the avant and the garde, but Van Sant contravenes the dictum: he has a sizable public. Some of the reason, I'd say, is the dollops of implicit despair with which he can make his viewers feel existentially deep without having to think about it. And much of his appeal, I'd say, is related to rock—his soundtracks are in some degree where his films are located. This is true of his new picture, which, according to those who know more about rock than I do (not difficult), uses some of that music as part of its texture. Further, the film was suggested by the suicide in 1994 of the rock star Kurt Cobain. Van Sant concludes with a note admitting that Cobain's life and death had suggestive power for him but states that his picture is fictional.

This is a paradox, because there is no fictional element in the picture—in the plot sense, anyway. Almost nothing happens. The story consists of having no story. As in *Gerry,* Van Sant has stripped away virtually anything that might be considered narrative or drama. We follow a young man for a couple of days (perhaps it's more, perhaps less) while he wanders around his country mansion in a narcotized state; we accompany him on dozy walks through the woods or while he lounges about with four hangers-on, while he sometimes eats something, sometimes dresses in drag, sometimes strums his guitar. Little in the film indicates that he is a big rock star like Cobain; less is hinted about the reasons for his general stasis. At least part of the atmosphere of the film, I suppose, is that explanation would be square. His being in the state he is in is its own explanation.

To those for whom this can be true, *Last Days* may prove to be a confirmation of Van Sant's stature as an ultra contemporary guru. For myself, this film is a further instance of John Cage–ism. Cage's *4'33"* is a piece in which a pianist sits at a piano motionless for four minutes and thirty-three seconds, during which all we hear is what the pianist is not doing, whatever that may be. One can easily make the case that music is a means of intensifying us aurally and that Cage is merely getting the notes out of our way. Somewhat similarly, Van Sant presents material for us to see and hear, but its purpose, it seems, is to concentrate us on what is not said and done.

In this daring, there comes a mild shock. (Not the fact that Van Sant's directorial ability and Harris Savides's camera work are much less stellar than the acolytes maintain: this, for me, has long been clear.) Near the end of *Last Days,* the young man, who has often lain down, lies down again on a floor, and this time he dies. We know this because, in a double-exposure shot, his naked body arises from his recumbent figure and ascends. This device, which would have seemed saccharine in the silent-film days, is howlingly dissonant with the style of the film. The shock is not that Van Sant slipped here, but that he didn't slip: he did it deliberately. A strange moment for him to make a stylistic joke that not only breaches the mood of the film but laughs at its implicit theme of present-day spiritual vacancy.

In the leading role Michael Pitt is neither good nor less than good. He simply mopes along druggedly for the film's ninety-seven minutes. Van Sant's inculcation of this non-performance is clearly part of his dogged negativism, his intent to purge his film—like others that he has done—of compliance with usual cinematic expectations, thus pleasing those who want a holiday from those expectations.

A new Japanese film, in its own quite different way, is another instance of style as the meaning of a piece. **TONY TAKITANI** was adapted by the director Jun Ichikawa from a story by Haruki Murakami, and it is inconceivable that Ichikawa thought the story had much substance. I risk an old bugaboo of criticism, the intentional fallacy, but I venture that, given Ichikawa's quite evident talent, the very slimness of the story stirred up in him an idea for stylistic experiment.

Tony Takitani is a successful illustrator in modern Japan. (He got his American first name from a friend of his father's.) He falls in love with and marries a younger woman, then discovers that she has a mania for buying clothes—dresses, shoes, coats. When the couple are in Europe, the wife continues her buying spree in Paris. The couple's house is so crowded with clothes that they have to convert an entire large room into a closet. The husband simply accepts his wife's mania and in fact is desolate when he is left with only her clothes.

This may sound like the core of an absurdist Ionesco-like farce, but nothing in the film is played for comedy. Instead Ichikawa treats the story in a cool, almost scrutinizing way. Every scene is played as

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if on a stage, with minimal furnishing and spare lighting. A recurrent voice-over keeps the characters and action at a fixed distance from us, neither far nor immediate. The film is in black and white except for just one shot when, to substantiate the moment, we see a mass of green leaves. Especially important, a repeated movement of the camera seems to take us through the story as through an album of living pictures. When a scene finishes, the camera glides to the right, past a thick black band, to the next shot. This happens continually even if the next scene is set in the same place as the scene just finished. And while all this goes on, a piano picks gently at the silence.

The effect is strange: it makes the director the protagonist of his picture. We cannot be much moved or amused by the leading characters: we are held only by the way the picture is made, thus by the intelligence that created this style. Not many of us, I think, would want to see many films made this way, possibly not one more, but this one is an intriguing glance at the director-as-god, deigning to treat human frailty with imperial sway, assuming that his art justifies this slender material. ■

István Deák

Hell and Liberation

THE SIEGE OF BUDAPEST: ONE HUNDRED DAYS IN WORLD WAR II
By Krisztián Ungváry
Translated by Ladislaus Löb
(Yale University Press, 475 pp., $35)

IT WAS A PEACEFUL SCENE AT THE cogwheel-train terminal at the top of a hill on the Buda side of Budapest on Christmas Eve 1944, as passengers waited for a ride into town. For nearly two months now they had been hearing the guns of the Soviet artillery in the east, but not many people in this rather prosperous part of Buda had relatives or acquaintances in the poorer eastern outskirts of Pest to worry about. Suddenly a group of soldiers appeared on the platform, carrying unfamiliar-looking submachine guns and revealing a strange uniform under their white overalls. They were an advance party of the Soviet Red Army. They quietly boarded the train with the other passengers and, as legend relates, promptly relieved some civilians of their watches. With the completely unexpected appearance of the Russians in the western part of the Hungarian capital, the iron ring around the city closed almost completely, and one of the most dramatic sieges in World War II history had begun.

The Siege of Budapest is an exceedingly dramatic book, filled with fascinating stories, some of them even humorous, and with heart-rending accounts of suffering, limitless cruelty, and amazing decency. It also contains detailed accounts of battle plans, logistics, troop movements, and casualty statistics. In his valuable foreword, John Lukacs rightly observes that "as a military history [the book] is unrivaled."

I spent part of my childhood only a few steps from the cogwheel-train line, and I can easily visualize the scene as it is described in Ungváry's extraordinary book. As he makes clear—and as those from that quarter of Buda know well—the sudden appearance of the victorious Red Army did not amount to a peaceful takeover. For the next six weeks, the front stagnated near the cogwheel line. Thousands of civilians and soldiers in the area were killed; hundreds of buildings crumbled under bombardment; the Hungarian Arrow Cross militia massacred the patients of three Jewish hospitals just a few steps behind the front; wounded prisoners were shot dead on both sides; and Red Army soldiers raped and looted to their hearts' delight. Finally, on February 11, 1944, as the last German and Hungarian troops tried to break out toward the west from Castle Hill in Buda, the streets near the lower cogwheel terminal became clogged with dead bodies and wrecked cars.

Ungváry first made a name for himself in the late 1990s as one of the major critics of the famous (and infamous) German traveling exhibition on crimes committed by the Wehrmacht, the regular German armed forces, in Eastern Europe and the Balkans. The exhibition, set up by a privately funded institute in Hamburg, successfully demolished the self-exculpatory German myth that only the SS was guilty, especially of the massacre of the Jews. Unfortunately, the moral and political significance of the exhibit was marred by the exhibitors' zealous dogmatism and hasty generalizations. As the Polish historian Bogdan Musial has demonstrated, many of the photographs allegedly depicting Polish, Ukrainian, and Russian victims of Wehrmacht massacres actually showed victims of the NKVD, the Soviet political police. And Ungváry proved, in a memorable essay, that several of the alleged Wehrmacht murderers pictured in the exhibit were not Germans but Hungarians, Finns, and Croats. Considering that Ungváry is a Hungarian patriot and the proud scion of a family of soldiers, his spontaneous unmasking of Hungarian cruelties testifies to his objectivity. Yet Ungváry went further, claiming that only about 10 percent of the nearly one thousand photos actually showed the Wehrmacht committing crimes.

Ungváry carefully distinguishes between the killing of innocent Jews and the brutalities that attend partisan warfare on all sides. He also separates those who did the actual killing—in the case of the Jews, often only a handful of SS men equipped with machine guns—from those who collected and guarded the Jews or escorted them to the place of execution. By making these distinctions, Ungváry does not wish to exculpate these partners in crime, but only to show that an enormous number of people—ordinary German soldiers; Ukrainian, Estonian, Latvian, and Lithuanian civilians and SS men; Hungarian and Romanian soldiers and gendarmes; Czech, French, Dutch, and Norwegian policemen; and so on—participated in the Final Solution. Only in the case of Serbia can one state unequivocally that the killing of the Jews and the Serbs was done exclusively by regular German army units.

As a result of the campaign mounted by Musial, Ungváry, and others, the exhibition about the Wehrmacht was closed down in Germany in 1999, and the projected showing of the pictures in New York never took place. The critics' argu-

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ments had other serious consequences. They added fuel to the fire of the Germans who were denying any Wehrmacht culpability in the Holocaust, and at the same time they showed that the SS did not carry sole responsibility for the killings, nor did even the Germans in general, but that millions of Europeans were involved in the genocide in one way or another. In an even more recent book, as yet untranslated, which deals with the history of the Hungarian armed forces during World War II, Ungváry presents for the first time a detailed map of the places in the Soviet Union where the Hungarian army of occupation played a crucial role in the systematic extermination of Jews.

UNGVÁRY IS A RESEARCHER AT the Budapest Institute for the History of the 1956 Revolution (and a respected connoisseur and grower of Tokaj wines). He is certainly one of the most intellectually stimulating scholars in Hungary, and also a public figure whose pronouncements in the media create considerable excitement. The problem is that sometimes, as occasionally in *The Siege of Budapest,* his political message is hard to follow. In his arduous pursuit of truth as he sees it, Ungváry hits left and right. He has publicly and violently castigated the controversial House of Terror, created in Budapest by Hungary's previous conservative-nationalist government, for overplaying communist atrocities and for not paying sufficient attention to the violent anti-Semitism of the right-wing regimes during World War II. Similarly, he has set himself against the cult of Count Pál Teleki, who, as prime minister in 1941, committed suicide rather than help the Germans attack Yugoslavia but was also an unrelenting Jew-hater.

Ungváry also goes out of his way, or so it seems to many, to emphasize that the Bolsheviks and the Nazis were two equally criminal regimes; and he subscribes to the increasingly popular notion, especially in Germany, that Germany's attack on the Soviet Union came in the nick of time before the Soviet Union attacked Germany. In a significant scholarly article, unfortunately available only in Hungarian, Ungváry marshals strong evidence to show that in 1941 Stalin was preparing to attack Nazi Germany. Ungváry does not claim, as some German nationalist historians have done, that the Germans fought a preventive war; the reality, in his view, was that two evil aggressors clashed in June 1941. Still, one must object that finally it was Germany that sent its bombers, tanks, and soldiers into Soviet Russia and not the other way around. Nor does Ungváry's thesis of mutual aggression explain why Operation Barbarossa caught Stalin by surprise, with the result that millions of Soviet soldiers and nearly one-half of the Soviet Union's industrial base were lost immediately.

It is difficult to disagree with Ungváry regarding the often abominable behavior of the Red Army soldiers in liberated Budapest, yet he himself often repeats, especially in his book on the Hungarian army, that the Soviet crimes in Central Europe were preceded by the abominable behavior of the Axis occupation forces in the Soviet Union. The question of cause and effect cannot be smoothed over by talk about equal guilt.

True, as Ungváry explains, the Germans, Hungarians, and others in Ukraine seldom raped local women, nor did they kill whole families while in a drunken stupor, which Red Army soldiers did in Central Europe. But all this still pales in comparison with the Germans' systematic murder of about five million Eastern European Jews, and the extermination, mainly through starvation, of at least three million Soviet prisoners of war. Soviet, Ukrainian, and Polish partisans, whether communist, non-communist, or anti-communist, had no hesitation about torturing, mutilating, and killing their Axis captives. (Except in such regions where there was a silent agreement of mutual toleration between the nationalist, non-Bolshevik partisans on the one side and the Hungarian occupation forces on the other side.) It is also true that the Soviet High Command considered the act of surrendering to the enemy a capital offense, which led many isolated and surrounded Soviet units to hide in the forests and join the partisans.

HUNGARY JOINED OPERATION Barbarossa on June 26, 1941, four days after the beginning of the German attack—in part, as Ungváry points out, so as not to enter the fray too late behind Romania, Slovakia, and Croatia, thereby showing insufficient gratitude to the Führer, who helped Hungary regain parts of the territories it had lost to Romania, Czechoslovakia, and Yugoslavia after 1918. The counter-revolutionary establishment's unrelenting anti-communism also played a role in that attack. Yet, as Ungváry rightly points out, the war was unpopular in Hungary, especially among the millions of poor people who had no fear of communism.

In *The Siege of Budapest,* and in his book on the Hungarian army, Ungváry demonstrates convincingly how ridiculously unprepared the country was for waging a major war. While those at home lived as in peacetime, the army moved to the front in miniature Italian tanks that a rifle bullet could pierce, in private automobiles and trucks confiscated from businesses, in peasant carts (which turned out to be useful at least in snow and mud), and on bicycles. The Hungarians had proportionally fewer weapons than any other army in the campaign, and it was not unusual to see units move up to the trenches without firearms in the hope of receiving the weapons of those they were about to replace. All this may be explained by the country's poverty, and by the fact that the Paris peace treaties had forbidden Hungary to maintain more than a minuscule army. But then why go to war, especially as Germany did not at first ask for Hungarian participation?

The result of these shortcomings was a military defeat nearly unparalleled in the history of a country already rich in military defeats. In the winter of 1942–1943, the Hungarian Second Army—that is, the entire Hungarian force at the front—was destroyed at the same time as the Germans were surrendering at Stalingrad. The majority of the two hundred thousand or so Hungarian soldiers fell in battle, or were taken prisoner, or succumbed to typhus, or froze to death. Sharing the fate of the soldiers were some forty thousand Jewish slave laborers, who, if they were not murdered by their Hungarian guards or by the harsh Russian winter, were treated as poorly in Soviet captivity as the "Christian" soldiers.

Ungváry seems to be the first historian to show that several Hungarian units at the front contained an absolute majority of Romanians, Slovaks, and Ruthenes (or Carpatho-Ukrainians), who had even less incentive to fight than the Magyar-speaking peasant recruits. Interestingly, under direct Soviet attack some Jewish forced laborers picked up castaway weapons in order to stop the attackers. After all, as Ungváry writes, the Jews, too, preferred Hungarian oppression to Soviet prison camps. Other writers, both

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Jewish and anti-Semitic, have claimed that Jews picked up weapons in order to fight as anti-Nazi partisans. Some of them later returned to Hungary as communist liberators. The Jewish slave laborers, too, had varied political convictions.

Following the annihilation of Hungary's Second Army at the Don River, the government began cautiously to explore the possibility of surrendering to the Western allies, who were nowhere to be seen. By late 1943, Hungary was in many ways a neutral country; this caused Hitler to lose patience and, on March 19, 1944, to send his troops into the country. The Germans' goal was to keep Hungary in the war and, simultaneously, to solve the "Jewish Question." Despite all the anti-Semitic legislation as well as the constant anti-Semitic agitation in the press, there were still nearly eight hundred thousand persons in the country whom the law regarded as Jews. Most people within this number, which was then the largest surviving Jewish community in Hitler's Europe, lived fairly normal lives, sometimes even prosperous ones.

Not only was there no resistance in Hungary to the German occupation, but under Nazi pressure Regent Miklós Horthy, the uncrowned semi-constitutional ruler of Hungary, appointed a pro-Nazi cabinet, which did its utmost to mobilize the population and the economy for war. It also began deporting the Jews to German-held lands. Between May and July 1944, Adolf Eichmann and the Hungarian authorities expedited some 437,000 Jews to Auschwitz. But early in July Horthy at last drew the line, forbidding the deportation of 200,000 Budapest Jews. A large number of the latter were still alive in December 1944, when the city's siege began.

THROUGHOUT 1943 AND 1944, the Red Army kept getting closer to the borders of Hungary, and after Romania changed sides, on August 23, 1944, Soviet and Romanian troops suddenly appeared in the then-Hungarian-ruled northern part of Transylvania. I was a member of a labor company in the region at the time, and was treated to the hitherto unimaginable spectacle of a fleeing German army. Dirty and ragged infantrymen, airmen, sailors, East European auxiliaries, Romanian and Soviet POWs: whether walking or crammed into boxcars, they rushed into the fields to chew sunflower seeds at every opportunity.

Now, finally, the Hungarians began to think of surrendering even to the hated Bolshevik enemy. The attempt failed, because on October 16, SS soldiers and paratroopers arrested the regent and replaced him with Ferenc Szálasi, the unbalanced leader of the fascist Arrow Cross Party. As "Leader of the Nation," he filled the entire first session of the "Crown Council," on November 2, 1944, with a rant about Hungarian-Japanese relations and the need for Germany, Japan, and Hungary to divide the Asiatic sphere.

When Szálasi came to power as the Germans' very last resort, the Red Army was already deep in Hungary, winning a crucial tank battle some one hundred miles east of the Hungarian capital. Early in *The Siege of Budapest*, Ungváry provides a transcript of a telephone conversation on October 28, 1944 between Stalin and Marshal Rodion Malinovsky, the commander of the so-called Second Ukrainian Front, a vast group of armies. Stalin ordered Malinovsky to seize Budapest in five days—an impossible task, as Ungváry convincingly demonstrates. The main reason for the Soviet dictator's impatience was his desire to demonstrate to the Western allies that Hungary was within his sphere of interest. This haste resulted in enormous losses on the Soviet side, and in Stalin's decision to move another group of armies, Marshal Fedor Tolbukhin's Third Ukrainian Front, from Serbia to Hungary. This latter group of armies then crossed the Danube far to the south of Budapest, and while Malinovsky's forces were trying to cross the same river immediately south of the capital, Tolbukhin's soldiers moved up in Transdanubia from the southwest, meeting almost no resistance. On December 24, they suddenly encircled the city.

If Stalin saw the capture of Budapest as a political necessity, Hitler saw its defense with similar political urgency. Besides, there was the need to protect the Hungarian oil fields in the southwestern part of the country: they were the Third Reich's last source of natural fuel. Thus it came about that, while the Soviet army was poised in central Poland for an attack on Warsaw, Hitler withdrew the crack Fourth SS Panzer Corps from that front and threw it into the battle in Hungary. Now half the German tanks in the east were engaged in Hungary, which had become Hitler's favorite battlefield. In order to re-conquer Budapest, the Führer later also transferred his best force in the west, the Sixth SS Panzer Army, to Hungary.

In January, the Russians broke through the central front in Poland, and within a few weeks they were only forty miles east of Berlin. But even this mortal threat did not stop Hitler from sending more troops to Hungary and ordering offensive after offensive there. It is amazing to consider that at the end of March, when American forces were already in Frankfurt and the Red Army was just a few miles east of Berlin, massive German armies held out in Norway, Denmark, the Netherlands, the Baltic countries, the Czech lands, Austria, Croatia, Italy, and Hungary.

WHEN BUDAPEST WAS surrounded, at Christmastime 1944, a few streetcars were still able to cross the front lines with people returning home from holiday shopping. Family members called each other with the news that "Ivan is here," and when the Hungarian central military command telephoned some local military and police stations, it was often a Russian voice that answered. But this somewhat romantic and colorful moment of the siege soon gave way to terrible fighting and a breakdown of all public and private services. First the streetcars stopped running; then stores closed (except for some bakeries that persevered for an astonishingly long time); later electricity, gas, and the telephone became unavailable; and finally water no longer came through the faucets, except in a few places in the city. All this, with nearly eighty thousand German and Hungarian soldiers and well over eight hundred thousand civilians trapped within the city. Ungváry takes some pride in demonstrating that in Leningrad, where there were more civilians and where the siege lasted nine hundred days, the fighting was not within the city, as it was in Budapest; and that in Stalingrad, most of the civilians had been evacuated before the arrival of the Germans, unlike in Budapest; and that the sieges of Berlin and Vienna were shorter; and finally that Rome, Paris, Brussels, Amsterdam, Oslo, Copenhagen, Athens, Sofia, Bucharest, and Belgrade all fell with little or no fighting. Among the capital cities, only the fate of Warsaw was more tragic than the fate of Budapest.

To make matters worse, there was not even a semblance of a central authority

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in the besieged city. After the Arrow Cross government had fled to the west, district party and militia units were vying for power with the remnants of the state and municipal authorities, the police, and the commanders of the Hungarian and German military. Oddly, the one Arrow Cross newspaper left in the besieged part of the city admonished the block administrators, as late as February 9, in the midst of complete chaos, to remit rents instantly to the City Council. One wonders how well this order was obeyed, considering that mortar shells and bombs rained incessantly. Yet the Soviet bombers did not wreak as much damage in Budapest as the Anglo-American bombers wreaked in Berlin, Hamburg, or Dresden. When it was all over, it turned out that the great majority of the city's dwellings were still habitable, if one can call it habitation when a part of an apartment is missing (as was the case in my family's apartment), or a huge unexploded bomb is sitting in the bathtub (as happened in the house of a friend of mine), or the building is nearly intact but inside the furniture is smashed and excrement is piled up in the grand piano, compliments of the liberators.

As Ungváry carefully explains, nearly forty thousand civilians died unnatural deaths during the siege. But how did so many survive? The answer is that Budapest was in many ways still an old-fashioned place where wells could be re-opened, and where several artesian springs spewed hot and cold water. In both the grand apartment houses and the proletarian tenements, there existed large cellars where each tenant had his little compartment and where coal, firewood, and food could be kept. There were also the horses of the military, some thirty thousand of them, who roamed the streets gnawing on park benches and tree bark until hungry neighbors set upon them with axes and kitchen knives. Life in the cellars could be horrifying, but occasionally also quite jolly, as many memoirs attest. Light was provided by pieces of string planted into shoe wax, just enough illumination for the happy initiation of many a teenage boy and girl into the mysteries of love.

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THE FIGHTING WAS EXCRUCIATingly slow and difficult, as it always seems to be in urban areas. Hitler had declared Budapest a fortress, but there was nothing fortress-like in this huge urban sprawl, half of which, the Buda side, consisted mostly of hills. Ungváry explains how cosmopolitan the fighting forces were: on the Soviet side, nearly all the nationalities of the Soviet Union, including such Balts, Ukrainians, and Poles whom the Red Army had picked up in liberated territory, many of whom had been POWs or nationalist, anti-Soviet partisans. There was also an entire Romanian army corps on the Soviet side that fought bravely but some of whom, along with their commander, later landed in Soviet jails or concentration camps. On the other side, one found, besides the Hungarians and the Germans from the Reich, many Austrians as well as ethnic Germans from the region who had been drafted into the SS and often spoke no German or only a dialect that a German from the Reich could not understand. In addition, there were the volunteers, recruited into the SS from among the peoples of the Soviet Union as well as Alsatians, Frenchmen, Serbs, Slovaks, Spanish volunteers, Scandinavians, and others.

The quality of the troops varied enormously: a large part of the Soviet troops seem to have been leaderless drifters or outright deserters who obeyed no one. Not that the regular Soviet soldiers typically obeyed their officers. The most common sight in Budapest was drunken soldiers exchanging fisticuffs with their officers, or yelling at each other without distinction of rank. Had it not been for the elite "Guards" units and other shock troops, it is hard to see how the Red Army could have made any progress at all. On the German side, quality also varied from the utter dedication of the Reich German Waffen SS to the relative unreliability of the locally recruited Waffen SS units. What drove all the Germans, though, was the realization that surrender would, in all likelihood, bring death, immediate or slow.

The quality of the Hungarian troops varied from bad to terrible, at least if we are to believe the German commanders who competed with each other, after the war, in blaming Hitler and the Hungarians for the disaster at Budapest. It is true that, as Ungváry shows, most Hungarian regulars had only one desire: namely, to find civilian clothes and then melt into the population. The sorriest spectacle of all must have been presented by the postmen, streetcar conductors, and policemen whom the Arrow Cross leaders threw into the battle without any training or usable weapons. In fact, some police battalions were destroyed only after the Soviet commanders had first ascertained the nationality of these strange opponents in blue uniforms with French-type helmets. The only dedicated fighters among the Hungarians seemed to have been some young volunteers, mostly high school and university students assembled into ad hoc battalions. Why these youngsters considered the ruin of the capital and their own untimely deaths a worthwhile goal remains a mystery.

THE RED ARMY AT FIRST CONcentrated on Pest, the eastern half of the city, moving gradually from the suburbs into the center. Some neighborhoods saw little if any combat, and their inhabitants barely noticed that they had changed sides. In eastern Pest, where I spent the last two weeks before the liberation, the coming of the Red Army was marked only by the sudden disappearance of a German heavy mortar battery from the neighboring building. Not that its soldiers had done much fighting; their ammunition allowed only for one or two launchings a day. These young boys from Cologne had spent the rest of the time trying to fraternize with some young women in my cellar, who were all Jews in hiding.

The first wave of Soviet soldiers appeared markedly more mature than the Germans. They wore fur hats, greasy but highly useful padded uniforms, spoons stuck in their boots, and small sacks on their backs fastened with a piece of string, which seemed to contain all their worldly possessions. Our liberators arrived in near silence, and were friendly. The rabble came later, as did the total chaos and the debilitating uncertainty regarding the soldiers' intentions. With the Germans and even with the Arrow Cross, things were relatively simple: either they accepted your forged papers or they did not, and only in the latter case were you in mortal trouble. The Red Army soldiers were more casual with your hastily fabricated new papers. In any case, how were you to decide in an instant, when escape was still conceiv-

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able, whether the *malenkii robot*, the "little work" that the soldiers had invited you to perform, would mean as little as pushing a gun to another position or as much as an endless journey to Siberia with hardly a chance of return? An invitation to the women in the cellar to peel potatoes could mean precisely that, or a horrifying night with a bunch of drunken and often diseased soldiers. Meanwhile, the Nazi super, who had been hiding the Jewish women for money, demanded with increasing exasperation that his former wards protect him and his family against Red Army depredations. "After all," he kept repeating, "it was you Jews who had called in the Russians." And everywhere there was the blatant contradiction between reality and the gaudy Soviet posters, executed in a socialist realist style, extolling the superiority of the "Soviet Man."

In many parts of Pest there was bitter fighting, and the so-called Big Ghetto was liberated only on January 16, 1945, two days before the last German and Hungarian troops fled west, across the Danube. The survival of at least one hundred twenty thousand Jews in the Hungarian capital is a near-miraculous story, many times told, although barely known in the west. Suffice it to say here that even after the Arrow Cross had come to power and Eichmann had returned to Budapest to complete his work, there was to be no total annihilation of the Jews.

It is true that some fifty thousand were driven west, mostly on foot, to build fortifications on the Austrian border. (Auschwitz was out of commission by then.) It is also true that most of the deportees perished under the blows of Hungarian soldiers, Arrow Cross militia, and Austrian peasant youngsters. But the rest of the Budapest Jews were either driven into a newly created ghetto—the only such institution in Europe at the time—or were taken under the wing of neutral legations and assembled into so-called protected houses, which went by the name of Little or International Ghetto. That such ghettoes could be set up at all was due primarily to the Arrow Cross leadership's craving for recognition by the Vatican, Sweden, Switzerland, and other neutral countries. To achieve such a lofty international status became for the government more important than even the total elimination of the Hungarian Jews.

In addition to the seventy thousand Jews in the Big Ghetto and the thirty thousand Jews in the International Ghetto, at least twenty thousand Jews were hiding in the city, using forged papers and benefiting from the assistance of their non-Jewish neighbors. Now that nearly everybody was hiding for one reason or another, mostly to avoid military service or evacuation to the West, and now that the Red Army was approaching with the perceived threat of a terrible retribution, hiding one's Jewish acquaintances became a fairly common practice. Still, for the first time in Hungarian history, hiding a Jew, and even the failure to denounce a Jew, became a capital offense, and a few "righteous Gentiles" did indeed make the supreme sacrifice.

Those in the International Ghetto fared perhaps the worst, because the generous protection extended by the likes of Raoul Wallenberg, the Swiss consul Carl Lutz, the Papal Nuncio Angelo Rotta, and others could not include armed defense. This meant that armed hooligans from the Arrow Cross raided these houses almost nightly, dragging people to the Danube shore, where they were shot and pushed into the river. Ungváry estimates that at least three thousand perished this way, mainly from among the better-educated and wealthier Jews who had had the right connections to obtain genuine or forged letters of consular protection.

Poorer Jews languished in the Big Ghetto, where the walls surrounding the place, as well as some police patrols, were of help. Also, the municipality provided the ghetto with some food, as long as any food was available. Still, many died: those crowded into the Ghetto had no food reserves, and Arrow Cross gangs were roaming the streets. Ungváry claims that an SS–Arrow Cross plan for the last-minute extermination of all the inhabitants of the Big Ghetto was thwarted by the quick action of a renegade Arrow Cross officer and the Wehrmacht General Gerhard Schmidhuber (who was subsequently killed during the breakout). There does not seem to be evidence to prove that such a murderous plan ever existed.

Once liberated, the inhabitants of the ghetto had to learn quickly that being a Jewish survivor did not endear one to

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many Soviet soldiers. Some of the liberated Jews were grabbed and marched away to Siberia in order to help make up a mysteriously set quota for prisoners of war. But generally life in Pest returned to something like normal at an astonishing speed: peasants began to bring in food, expecting to be paid in gold or family possessions, and while the fighting was still continuing in Buda a movie house opened in central Pest. It showed the Soviet film *The Battle of Orel*, in which the audience was treated to the double thrill of being able to watch Soviet airplanes machine-gun and bomb the enemy first on the screen and then outside the theater. (I thought that only I recalled this extraordinary circumstance, but the very thorough Ungváry has found this story for his book, too.) Moreover, on February 4, 1945, with the war still raging in Buda, a revolutionary People's Court in Pest sentenced two war criminals to death. They were hanged in a public square, having nearly been lynched by Jewish survivors.

On January 18, after the remaining troops crossed over to Buda, the Germans blew up the last three of Budapest's seven magnificent bridges, most of them a tribute to the great expectations of the age of Franz Josef. Thereafter, and for several weeks to come, only a few daredevils could get from one half of the city to the other half, by walking on the cracking, shifting ice and then taking rowboats. Those who did the dangerous rowing among the ice blocks were mostly Red Army soldiers in boats they had liberated, including racing skiffs. For payment, the ferrymen were usually satisfied with a bottle of spirits.

Meanwhile, the Soviet ring around the defenders in Buda became ever tighter, until only Castle Hill was left, a historic height that had served as the residence of kings since medieval times. Conditions on Castle Hill, especially in the casemates and tunnels inside the mountain, defied the imagination. Basing his account mostly on recent memoirs, Ungváry describes the heartbreaking plight of the thousands of wounded soldiers and civilians who rotted alive in the heat and filth of the underground hospitals, all without food, light, or medicine.

Hitler forbade any attempt to break out of the encirclement. The last glider flights bringing in supplies landed a few days earlier, and parachute drops had also been discontinued. Finally the German commander, Waffen SS General Karl Pfeffer-Wildenbruch, decided to lead the remnants of his troops out. Typically, the Germans hardly ever consulted the Hungarian commander of the city. On the night of February 11, twenty-eight thousand German and Hungarian troops began to stream down from Castle Hill, followed by thousands of civilians. Entire families, pushing prams, treaded the snow and ice.

Amazingly, many of the Red Army troops panicked and ran ahead of the enemy that was itself running away; but soon the Russians rallied and mowed down the fugitives. Pfeffer-Wildenbruch, the Hungarian General Ivan Hindy, and other high brass attempted to escape through a long culvert covering a brook, but their bodies swelled in the water, and they were soon forced to climb out through manholes and were captured. Only seven hundred made it to the German-Hungarian side, a few dozen miles west of Budapest.

Beginning on December 22, 1944, Hungary had a democratic coalition government, set up by the Soviets in Debrecen, in eastern Hungary. Its head and two of its ministers were generals from the old regime; other cabinet members, including some crypto-communists, came from anti-Nazi circles; only the two official communist cabinet members arrived from Moscow. Needless to say, this government, and the new National Assembly, had only as much power—in fact, only as much food to eat—as the Soviets were willing to grant them. In the opposite camp, Ferenc Szálasi continued to proclaim his wild utopian ideas while his underlings terrorized what was left to them of Hungary. At the end of March, the entire Arrow Cross regime fled to Austria, together with several hundred thousand other Hungarians and much of the Hungarian national treasure, including the Holy Crown of St. Stephen and the gold of the National Bank. A year later, Szálasi and every member of his cabinet, as well as all the pro-Nazi leaders of the Horthy regime, were executed in Budapest. The former regent himself was allowed to settle in Portugal.

Within a year, Budapest was again a buoyant capital, but sixty years after the siege some buildings still bear the marks of machine gun and mortar fire. Remarkably, during the revolution of 1956, the Soviet army again besieged the city, but this time its defenders were a few thousand students and young workers. Their Molotov cocktails proved to be more efficient against the new giant Soviet tanks than the anti-tank guns of 1944–1945 had been.

It is hard to disagree with Ungváry's assertion that cities are extremely difficult to take if the defenders are willing to sacrifice both the population and themselves. Red Army and Romanian casualties in the struggle for the capital and in associated actions amounted to seventy thousand dead; every other Soviet soldier who died in Hungary gave his life for Budapest. German and Hungarian casualties are nearly impossible to estimate, but they were less than the Soviet losses. "The siege, from a Soviet point of view," Ungváry observes, "amounted to a series of defeats." Or, as a Soviet general wrote, Soviet "plans to reach Vienna by the end of December and southern Germany in March were upset mainly by the lengthy siege of the Hungarian capital." This means that, from a German point of view, the siege was a qualified success, because it delayed the arrival of the vengeful Soviet troops into German-speaking lands. Had this truly been the Germans' aim, one might have some strategic respect for their actions, but in fact Hitler hoped for victory almost to the last minute, and his generals were too weak or too cowardly to take independent action in genuine defense of the German people.

Ungváry is also right when he states in his conclusion that, from a Hungarian point of view, the sacrifice of the Hungarians "was the most senseless of the three." Yet, as it turns out, he is not talking here only about the hopeless and self-destructive struggle of the Hungarian soldiers on the German side. Instead he rehearses his thesis regarding the two evil aggressors: "The Hungarian soldiers—whichever side they joined—could only play the part of extras in the destruction of their country." I do not see it the same way. Even though there can be no doubt regarding the destructive behavior of many Red Army soldiers—and who in his right mind would dispute the horrors of the Stalinist regime?—it was still the sacrifice of the Red Army soldiers that put an end to the war and allowed for the reconstruction of Hungary. Having stopped the Germans and their allies at Stalingrad, how could anyone expect the Red Army not to pursue the torturers

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of Russia all the way to Vienna and Berlin? The Hungarian attack on the Soviet Union, on June 26, 1941, led inevitably to the arrival of the Red Army soldiers in Hungary in the fall of 1944.

Besides, in some ways the Soviet regime mellowed over the decades, and so did communism in Hungary. No parts of the population were systematically exterminated under communist rule, which is what the Nazis were doing in 1944 to the Hungarian Jews and what they might well have done to other Hungarians following the final victory of the "German race." We must pay tribute to the millions of Red Army soldiers who died in the struggle against what was genuinely a "fascist beast."

One can well understand the idealism of the Hungarian volunteers on the German side in Buda, but admiration is due not to them but to the Buda Volunteer Regiment that helped to take Castle Hill from the Germans. Admiration is due also to the small and dedicated group of resisters whose contribution was worth all the sacrifice, even if it shortened the war in Hungary by only a few minutes. I may never again have the opportunity to say this in a major American journal, so let me record here the name of Endre Bajcsy-Zsilinszky. He does not enjoy the fame that he deserves, in part because his name is so unpronounceable outside Hungary; but as a member of parliament he protested against Hungary's participation in the war, and also against its anti-Semitic measures. He, alone in the entire country, received the invading Germans on March 19, 1944 with a pistol in hand, and was wounded in the encounter. Later he headed the national resistance movement, for which the Hungarian Nazis tortured and hanged him on Christmas Eve 1944. And let me also mention Béla Stollár, who happened to be my sister's fiancé, and who was killed in a gun battle with the Hungarian Nazis in Budapest on the same Christmas Eve. He was recognized posthumously by Yad Vashem, together with hundreds of other Hungarians, as a righteous Gentile. No, these resisters and saviors of Jews did not simply play "the part of extras in the destruction of their country." ■

Caleb Crain

Hazards and Fortunes

WILLIAM DEAN HOWELLS: A WRITER'S LIFE
By Susan Goodman and Carl Dawson
(University of California Press, 519 pp., $34.95)

ELINOR HOWELLS, WIFE OF THE novelist William Dean Howells, was slender, and she collapsed frequently. According to this comprehensive new biography of her husband by Susan Goodman and Carl Dawson, Elinor's average weight was ninety pounds. The couple's eldest daughter, Winifred, was never strong, and by the age of twenty-five she had shrunk to fifty-nine pounds. Institutionalized and forced to eat, Winifred rose to seventy-nine pounds in January 1889. She died two months later.

Howells himself was fat from early middle age. "Howells came in to dine," a friend reported in 1874, "plump and with ease shining out of his eyes." As the years passed, he grew fatter. "Somewhere, deep within my awkward bulk, I know that I am as young and stylish and slim as any of them," Howells confessed to his friend Henry James in 1882, "but I know also that I don't look it." He recommended, in jest, that James make a fictional study of him, as a type of the bourgeois man who thickened instead of living up to his lyric promise. He himself made such a study in his greatest novel, *A Modern Instance*, first published as a serial in 1881 and 1882. He modeled Bartley Hubbard—a journalist ready to sell out his friends, a husband who never fulfills his wife's hopes—on himself. Even if Howells had not owned up to the self-portrait in a letter, the girth of the character would have given it away. "That increasing bulk seemed not to represent an increase of wholesome substance," a fellow journalist in the novel observes of Bartley, "but a corky, buoyant tissue, materially responsive to some sort of moral dry-rot."

Bartley Hubbard was fat the way Tony Soprano is fat. He thrived where nicer people couldn't bear to. And so, it seems, did Howells. He made a comfortable living as an intellectual and literary artist in the Gilded Age, the most corrupt era in American history before our own, when Reconstruction was sabotaged, monopolies flourished, the spirit of workers was broken, innocent radicals were hanged, and elected officials expected kickbacks and lied fluently to start war. In a family of delicate women, Howells's healthy appetite must have made him feel a bit like Boss Tweed. Or, perhaps, Ugolino.

If there was something evil in his willingness to prosper, no one outside his family could see it. He appeared polite and responsible. As an editor and a critic at *The Atlantic Monthly* and then as an essayist for *Harper's*, he championed Henry James and was generous to younger writers, including Stephen Crane, Charles Chesnutt, Abraham Cahan, Paul Lawrence Dunbar, Hamlin Garland, and Edith Wharton. So flawless was his manner that even mockery in book reviews struck him as unkind. "Never try to be funny at [an author's] expense," he advised his sister Annie; "that's poor, cheap, cruel business." It seemed of a piece with his unassuming nature that he waited until he was forty to publish his first novel, and that he tried to give the impression that the delay was nothing special. "Until he is well on towards forty," he wrote when he was past sixty, a writer "will hardly have assimilated the materials of a great novel, although he may have amassed them."

HOWELLS NEVER INDULGED his art in a way that compromised his ability to provide for his family. Mark Twain and Henry James, who had no taste for each other, were both his intimates. By the end of his life, he had more or less become the literary establishment, benign and genteel. Such a man could hardly have known what evil was. That, at least, was what Henry James, who knew well what evil was, claimed in a review in 1886. "If many of his characters are disagreeable, almost all of them are extraordinarily good," James wrote. It was a tribute to the innocence of life in America, James

Caleb Crain is writing a history of the divorce of the nineteenth-century theatrical couple Edwin and Catharine Forrest.

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continued, that Howells's realist novels "exhibit so constant a study of the actual and so small a perception of evil."

Without evil, a novel is froth—or, worse, wholesome. To the detriment of Howells's reputation, James's verdict of not guilty has been sustained by generations of critics. But it was wrongly decided: the innocuous Howells was an alibi, devised to get the author through daily life. It was clever of James to pretend to mistake his friend's alibi for his friend's self. Toward Howells, he felt the special malice of an artist who owes to his chief rival favors that he cannot repay. Behind Howells's back, James was happy to call him a "tertiary talent . . . destined to fade slowly and softly away in self-repetition and reconcilement to the commonplace." He so envied Howells his beautiful style that he likened him to "a poor man holding a diamond and wondering how he can use it." To appreciate the viciousness of the comparison, bear in mind that Howells became a socialist.

James has been abetted in his treachery by the literary canon, which has chosen to remember Howells by *The Rise of Silas Lapham* (1885) and *A Hazard of New Fortunes* (1890), books in which there is, in fact, relatively little evil. Nor is there much coherence of plot, nor a satisfactory focus for the reader's sympathies. *A Foregone Conclusion* (1875), on the other hand, is lovely and insidious, and *A Modern Instance* is masterly and brutal. And in *Indian Summer* (1886), despite its sweet and wistful opening pages, two people nearly destroy each other for something they confuse with love.

"I wish I could convince somebody of my wickedness," says a man in love with Bartley Hubbard's wife, in *A Modern Instance*. Why has it been so hard to convince people of Howells's? Goodman and Dawson's biography led me to it, but gradually. At first the only relation between his life and his art seemed to be a reassuring, somewhat dull parable of diligence rewarded. There is a Dickensian childhood—a charismatic failure as a father, itinerancy, poverty, ink. Then, through hard work, he becomes a writer. "The best thing that can fill a man's mind is his work," Howells once wrote, "for if his work does not fill it, his self will fill it, and it can have no worse tenant." Goodman and Dawson share Howells's anti-romantic view of his career, and so I drifted into the impression that Howells was so professional that perhaps his life suggested very little about his art. I was aware that many of his characters had been to Italy, as he had, and that a number were editors, as he was; but for chapters and chapters I could not see how to draw the lines between his personal story and those he invented. According to Goodman and Dawson, for example, Howells and Elinor were devoted to each other, yet in *A Modern Instance* Howells describes the erosion of trust and goodwill in a marriage so finely but inexorably that it is excruciating. Between life and art, I thought, there must have been only the imagination's connection.

The details in this picture proved unruly. If Howells and his wife loved each other so intensely, why did she say to him, shortly before her death, that all she cared for was "well, James, and his way of doing things—and you"? Goodman and Dawson do not suggest that the comment might have hurt, but surely it was not quite wifely to bring Howells in as an afterthought. I began to suspect that this biography was itself Howellsian, in a way: prudent about what it said explicitly, never cruel to any of its characters, yet churning beneath the surface with conflicts that, once glimpsed, seemed to involve and to endanger everything.

Why were some of Howells's breakdowns timed as if to upstage those of his wife and daughters? Why did the Howells family have so many breakdowns, for that matter? And why did Howells often portray invalids in his fiction as manipulative or malingering? Often, but not always: in *The Undiscovered Country*, the medium Egeria wants to get well, and it is her father who is ambivalent. The closer she is to death, the further she reaches into the spirit world, and the more he is pleased. It is an unsettling subject for a writer whose daughter was dying of a disease without a name, but it was his wife's favorite of his books.

Goodman and Dawson quote Twain's description of a photograph that, in his opinion, captured Howells's hidden self:

> I have never seen such a difference between the real man & the artificial. Compare this one with the imposter which he works into book-advertisements. They say, Notice this smile; observe this benignity; God be with you Dear People, come to your Howells when you are in trouble, Howells is your friend. This one says, Bile! give me more bile; fry me an optimist for breakfast.

I did not appreciate this letter fully when I first read it. By the time I came back to it, I was ready to believe that Twain was a more astute psychologist of Howells than James—or, at least, a more candid one.

William Dean Howells was born March 1, 1837, the second of eight children, in a village in Ohio. His father dragged the family from town to town as he started and failed at newspaper after newspaper—anti-slavery, socialist, anti-Catholic, Swedenborgian, Whig. In 1852, after stints in a commune and as a postmaster, he settled down, more or less, to editing a newspaper called the *Ashtabula Sentinel* in Jefferson, Ohio, which his son referred to as "this not-to-be-sufficiently-detested village." William set type for his father and had almost no formal schooling, though he read intensively and taught himself Greek, Latin, Spanish, French, and German. Some of the childhood anecdotes in Howells's memoirs suggest resentments imperfectly buried. One evening he wished his father dead for coming late to dinner, and was warned that "wicked words were of the quality of wicked deeds." On another occasion he threw a rose at his mother as a joke, but she mistook it for a bat and "made me suffer for her fright."

In adolescence, his mind sickened. He became terrified of rabies and of dogs, and he once drank glass after glass of water, as if to prove to himself that he didn't have the disease's most famous symptom. Migraines incapacitated him, and he came to believe he would die on his seventeenth birthday. After he survived, he wrote a novel serialized in an Ohio paper, which, according to John W. Crowley's book *The Black Heart's Truth: The Early Career of W.D. Howells*, featured a character who went insane. His first attempts at independence faltered. Homesickness ended a job as city editor at the *Cincinnati Gazette* after only two months, and vertigo brought him home almost immediately from a job in Columbus reporting on the state legislature.

In the fall of 1858, Howells went back to Columbus as a reporter for the *Ohio State Journal*, a liberal Republican paper, and he stuck with it. In the evenings he even went to the dinners and the parties

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of the state capital's high society. Hypochondria and depression still afflicted him, and Goodman and Dawson report that when he saw "a well-dressed young man close to his own age working on a chain gang," he identified with the convict, irrationally but strongly. "Perhaps we are always meant to put ourselves in the place of those who are put, or who put themselves, to shame," he later wrote of the incident. It is an odd, revealing idea. Meant to, by whom? One thinks of Freud's comment about one of the effects of a harsh superego: "In many criminals, especially youthful ones, it is possible to detect a very powerful sense of guilt which existed before the crime, and is therefore not its result but its motive."

THE CRIME THAT HOWELLS had in mind was a literary career. "I do not think any man ought to live by an art," Howells wrote later in life. "He can say that, as the thing is, unless he sells his art he cannot live. . . . All the same, the sin and the shame remain." There may have been "something profane, something impious" about writing for money, but the young Howells pushed ahead at it. In August 1859, *The Atlantic* accepted one of his poems, and in December he and a friend published a book of poems together. In May 1860, in slightly more than a week, he composed a campaign biography of a rising politician named Abraham Lincoln. He then traveled east to meet James Russell Lowell, *The Atlantic*'s editor. Lowell brought him to lunch at Boston's Parker House, where he introduced the youth to James T. Fields, the magazine's owner, and to the doctor and anecdotalist Oliver Wendell Holmes Sr., who joked that the meal with the trinomial worthies amounted to a "laying on of hands." Lowell then forwarded Howells to Hawthorne, who forwarded him in turn to Emerson and Thoreau. The Transcendentalists do not seem to have made much of Howells, but the credentialing of the young man was complete.

Back in Columbus that December, Howells met Elinor Mead, a young woman from Vermont who thought of becoming an artist. One of her brothers was a sculptor; another, an architect, would become a partner in the firm McKim, Mead & White. The future president Rutherford B. Hayes was a distant cousin, but her most famous relative was probably her uncle, John Humphrey Noyes, whose commune in Putney, Vermont (later moved to Oneida, New York) practiced "complex marriage," a form of free love, and later "stirpiculture," a sort of eugenics, in the service of which Noyes had sex with a fair number of the commune's young women. Elinor was not tainted by her uncle's crimes, but one wonders how the severe young Howells took them.

For his service to Lincoln, Howells was named consul to Venice in 1861, and he spent the Civil War there. It was not a taxing post. To amuse himself, he wrote a history of Venice into his State Department reports. He and Elinor became engaged by letter, and they were married in Paris in December 1862. A year later, Elinor gave birth to Winifred. Howells wrote a series of letters about Venice to the *Boston Advertiser*, and he compiled them and his State Department history into a travelogue, *Venetian Life*, which sold well when it was published in 1866.

In December 1865, the war safely over, *The Nation* hired Howells to review books. A month later Fields hired him away, and Howells became an assistant editor at *The Atlantic*. "It does seem retrograding to go from New York to Boston," Elinor sighed. But at *The Atlantic* Howells "established himself as America's foremost writer," as Goodman and Dawson observe. He stayed fifteen years, steadily running the magazine's circulation numbers into the ground by allowing book reviews to lengthen into essays, publishing Henry James, and committing other acts of high-mindedness. Indulging longtime contributor Harriet Beecher Stowe in her attack on Byron's sex life, for example, cost fifteen thousand subscribers. By the time Howells left, circulation had sunk to twelve thousand.

HIS PERSONAL PRESTIGE, BY contrast, rose steadily. As a moonlighter Howells wrote half a dozen novels, including one of his best, *A Foregone Conclusion*, in which a young dilettante painter, serving as the U.S. consul in Venice during the Civil War, competes with an unstable Italian priest for an American girl. The peculiar force of the book comes from the painter's dog-in-the-manger arrogance, which forces the reader into rebellion against the plot. Despite such achievements, Howells must have envied his friends James and Twain, unencumbered by day jobs, and he resigned from *The Atlantic* in March 1881 on his forty-fourth birthday. The departure was risky—Howells now had three children and a large house in the suburbs to pay for—but not too risky. James Osgood, the magazine's new owner, would be paying him $10,000 a year for first serial rights. With his new freedom, Howells set out to write a novel on an epic scale. Like James's *Portrait of a Lady*, published later that year, *A Modern Instance* would take as its subject an unhappy marriage. But whereas James jump-cut from a scene just prior to the wedding of Isabel Archer and Gilbert Osmond to scenes of their marriage in a state near dissolution, Howells would focus on the slow disillusionment of Marcia Gaylord and Bartley Hubbard—the gradual accumulation of slights, injuries, and misunderstandings that James had skipped.

The writing happened to coincide with a cascade of sickness and unhappiness in Howells's family. Goodman and Dawson are oddly reticent about Howells's married life. Backhandedly, in a chapter otherwise devoted to Twain, they note that in later years the Howellses' marriage "appears at times to have grown if not more testy, then companionable rather than passionate, and more studiously courteous." Elsewhere they mention that Elinor had an "annual

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spring breakdown." They don't expand on either comment. But the record of the Howells family in the year he left *The Atlantic* suggests a great deal.

In November 1880, Winifred published a poem that likened the pains of life to the breaking of waves and looked forward to death ending the former the way the shore ended the latter. One thinks of Hawthorne's daughter Una giving one of her poems the title "Dead Sunshine": it was not a good sign. In December, the girl was due to turn seventeen, the age at which Howells had thought he would die. That month her vertigo became so severe that she was unable to accept an invitation from her relative Rutherford B. Hayes to visit the White House. Sometime after Howells left *The Atlantic* in March 1881, both Winifred and her mother checked into a clinic. While Howells was writing *A Modern Instance*, his wife recovered, but Winifred spent July, August, and September receiving the rest cure, a regimen that confined her to bed, required her to eat eight meals a day, and ruled out any activity, even reading. "Oh, papa," the girl exclaimed to her father, as she failed to get well, "what a strange youth I'm having!" Howells wrote to his father in August that "you can't think how tedious this sickness, or no-sickness has been."

In the fall, abruptly, Winifred improved, and Howells himself spent seven weeks in bed, where he lost twenty-six pounds. John W. Crowley has written that "Elinor, Winifred, and Will Howells took turns, as it were, breaking down." Crowley's speculations nicely complement the restraint of Goodman and Dawson, who chalk the sequence up to no more than "the unfailing logic of bad health." Something unpleasant seems to have been going on, but it is probably impossible to know what. As Howells himself would write, in *A Modern Instance*, "Married life is as much a mystery to ... outsiders as the life to come, almost."

Rotten, swollen Bartley Hubbard is damned by Marcia's father early in *A Modern Instance*. "I guess you're one of that *kind*, Mr. Hubbard," the father says, when he discovers that Bartley kissed a girl on the side while he was deciding whether to marry Marcia. A scoundrel for sure, the reader nods, borne along by the father's conviction, but ... it's just premarital kissing. Is Bartley such a great rascal? "He hasn't had any great opportunity yet," the father warns. The rest of *A Modern Instance* bears out the judgment of Marcia's father, though the reader never quite shakes the suspicion that his judgment is unfair.

In Howells's novels, however, people do not change. They merely develop the nature they already have. If a boy has no talent for poetry, the moral thing to do is discourage him. In *A Hazard of New Fortunes*, when the dilettante and flirt Angus Beaton vows to change, Alma Leighton recognizes in his offer further evidence of his narcissism and thrill-seeking. Change is a sentimental delusion peddled by novelists, and as John Updike has written, "it is a rare novel by Howells where the characters do not at some point sardonically contrast their behavior with that of people in novels." The badness of Bartley Hubbard is a seed. It is doomed to grow.

Why should Howells have seen himself in a bad man? A partial inventory: he left his talented brother Joseph trapped in Ohio, working for their impractical father. He also left behind his sisters, just as talented, burdened with the care of their youngest brother Henry, who was mentally retarded and so violent that he sometimes had to be kept behind double-bolted doors. He did not enlist in the Union Army, and a close boyhood friend was killed in the war by a sniper. In marrying, he seemed to take from his wife the chance to have a career of her own as an illustrator. And then there was the dark balance of illness in his family.

He put much of this into his fiction. The hero of *The Rise of Silas Lapham*, a rough-mannered paint manufacturer, takes care of the daughter of a comrade who "got a ball that was meant for me by a sharp-shooter." Fictional versions of Elinor are eternally returning to the choice between illustrating books and taking a husband. In *The Minister's Charge* (1887), the art student Jessie Carver marries, off-stage, but in *A Hazard of New Fortunes*, the painter Alma Leighton does not, and a stand-in for Howells praises her. "Why shouldn't we rejoice as much at a nonmarriage as a marriage?" he asks. "We know that in reality, marriage is dog-cheap, and anybody can have it for the asking—if he keeps asking enough people." As for mixed feelings about illness, they are everywhere in Howells's work. The apparently trivial *The Minister's Charge* has a particularly savage exchange: *"You waitin' for her to die?"* a woman demands of the hero, whom she suspects of wanting out of a love affair with her friend, who has tuberculosis.

Contra James, the perception of evil in Howells's novels is unusually broad. But it is a perception very different from

Expanses

Dizzy, from the German Düsig, meaning stupefied or: a head lifting too quickly into a posthumous snow, a snow still months to fall, wrapping him in simple, complete sentences. The architectures are unfinished, abundant, the flakes become visible around the naked bulb left on to unsee everything but the piece and where it was left, a grain in the oyster of his throat. The snow's cold logic sideswipes his face with the almost floating heaviness of legs that have run too far, landing where he can't land, making an image of him, a door in a field. A kitchen knife on the tongue. Someone's hand placed over his mouth. Roads are passing out under the white and he is a little surprised not to have also vanished. Stupefied, from the Latin meaning stunned and to make do: one on the porch, one turning the knob, one through.

RYAN FLAHERTY

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James's, which may account for his error. No awe surrounds evil in Howells. He would never have cast the spell of mystification around Gilbert Osmond's vanity that James did. Perhaps Howells intended a reply to his friend in *Annie Kilburn* (1888), when an alcoholic recalls the advice he got from the town minister: "You know how I like to go on about other people's sins, and the world's wickedness generally; but one day Brother Peck, in that cool, impersonal way of his, suggested that it was not a wholly meritorious thing to hate evil.... He said it was a good deal more desirable to understand evil than to hate it, for then we could begin to cure it." Peck is the sort of righteous man who does not decisively improve the lives of those around him until he is hit by a train, so there is some risk in ascribing his opinions to his author. But even that difficulty is distinctively Howellsian, and suggests something about his moral vision.

THE MAJOR FLAW OF THIS BIography is that it takes for granted that Howells is a novelist worth reading today. On first impression Howells seems funnier than James and subtler than Twain, but these days few readers outside academia even have a first impression of him. To make the case for his distinction, I would start here, in the somewhat perverse effect of his morality upon his style. The guilt of Howells's heroes may feel exaggerated to the reader, and the sins in question small, but it is probably only with a feeling of exaggeration, and with small sins, that a person can ever stand to see evil in himself. More we cannot really assimilate. It is only in sentimental novels, which Howells scorned, that people slay evil, or grandly repent of it and change.

And the moderation here is related to something else about Howells, which James did diagnose accurately: his hatred of story. Howells once told Edith Wharton in jest that "what the American public always wants is a tragedy with a happy ending." That is the shape his books usually take. No one learns from a catastrophe, he believed; trauma is too damaging to instruct. In most cases people see it coming and dodge it, anyway. Howells's great ambition was "to get into [fiction] from life the things that had not been got into fiction before," and uneventfulness was one of those things. At the conclusions of his novels, the rupture of a marriage engagement or the failure of a business turns out, typically, to be good news to almost everyone involved. The impression is of a novelist working against his instincts, tempering his force, as if to rebuke a part of him that might have been willing to pander.

Willingness to work may have been the only virtue that Howells could verify in himself. "If people care to remember me," he wrote, a little nervously, in old age, "the future must be amazed at the amount of my production." He was too prolific to stay away from magazines for long. From 1886 to 1892 he wrote a column for *Harper's Monthly*; from 1895 to 1898, for *Harper's Weekly*; and from 1900 to 1902, for *Harper's Monthly* again. In 1892 he let a New York glossy hire him as editor, to the dismay of Henry James, who wailed, "Why ... are you hanging again round your neck the chain & emblem of bondage?" Fortunately Howells was released from the job after just a few months.

IN HOWELLS'S EARLY YEARS, THERE was a great moral earnestness to intellectual life in America. The European revolutions of 1848 had powerful echoes here, and mixing with the abolition movement in the 1850s, those echoes brought forth strong thinking and beautiful writing about government and the individual. By the end of the century, however, commerce seemed in many domains to have dissolved political commitments into entertainment. In *A Hazard of New Fortunes*, Howells satirically imagined that a magazine might even publish an article advocating the return of slavery as a solution to the labor problem, if the editors thought that the outrage would boost sales. If Howells were alive today, he would have no trouble understanding the spirit in which a venerable New York publisher would create an imprint to take advantage of the market for reactionary politics and low journalistic standards.

That spirit of cynicism is one Howells himself never lapsed into. In addition to shaping his art, his awareness of his sins brought him naturally into sympathy with people like the convict he had seen as a young reporter in Ohio. In his fifties he toured the mills of Lowell and the slums of New York City. In Goodman and Dawson's telling, his finest moment may have been his appeal in 1887 on behalf of a group of anarchists, wrongly sentenced to death for a bombing in Chicago's Haymarket. "It blackens my life," he wrote to one friend. To another he wrote that "they are condemned to death upon a principle that would have sent every ardent anti-slavery man to the gallows."

But while Howells condemned the Haymarket trials as a farce, the anti-slavery men who had survived from the 1850s, such as John Greenleaf Whittier, Thomas Wentworth Higginson, and James Russell Lowell, kept silent. Among intellectuals, Howells stood up for the anarchists nearly alone. The mass media raged against him. "It seems ... almost a pity," he wrote, when he knew that he had lost and the men would die, "to mix a note of regret with the hymn of thanksgiving for blood going up from thousands of newspapers all over the land this morning." He turned toward the socialism of Tolstoy and was mocked for it. A decade later he protested the Spanish-American War, which he called a "wicked, wanton thing." After a visit to Spanish prisoners of war held in Portsmouth, Maine, he wrote to his daughter that America had devolved into the hands of "almost the meanest and the wickedest," and that he wished he were young enough to move to New Zealand.

Emerson once wrote that "men are conservatives when they are least vigorous, or when they are most luxurious." But Howells resisted the rightward creep of the aged and the wealthy, and joked that he was a socialist who wore "a fur-lined overcoat." *The Minister's Charge* may show most clearly the political use that Howells made of evil. The premise of the novel cannot but warm a critic's heart: a minister praises a poem he knows is bad, and is made to regret this crime for three hundred pages. The expiation is out of all proportion to the offense. As it happens, the false encouragement leads the poet into experiences that probably improve him. But the minister is improved, too. His guilt prompts him to write a long-postponed sermon on complicity, with this burden: "If a community was corrupt, if an age was immoral, it was not because of the vicious, but the virtuous who fancied themselves indifferent spectators." ■

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WASHINGTON DIARIST

Indian Summer

As I stood on the White House South Lawn in mid-July, it was obvious that President Bush had been quite serious when he reportedly told Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh in May that his summer visit to Washington was going to be a "grand event." American and Indian flags lined several downtown streets, as well as the south façade of the White House itself. A full honor guard stood at attention in the brutal Washington heat, and trumpet players signaled Singh's arrival. Soldiers fired a 19-gun salute. Standing near the presidential podium on the lawn were Dick and Lynne Cheney, Condoleezza Rice, Donald Rumsfeld, and General Peter Pace. Even Karl Rove, in an odd juxtaposition, sweated it out next to some Indian Catholic nuns. The Indian reporters around me were in shock: They had never seen a U.S. welcome mat for India this elaborate.

Nor had they probably expected the man who unfurled it to be a Republican. For decades, Democrats had been more pro-India (and less pro-Pakistan) than the GOP, which, during the cold war, deeply distrusted India for its ties to the Soviet Union. But here was Bush telling the audience that U.S.-India ties had "never been stronger"—and backing his words up with actions. Later that day, he hammered out a deal with Singh that would allow New Delhi to import civilian nuclear technology to help slake India's growing thirst for energy, as long as it brought its civilian nuclear facilities under international safeguards.

The deal carved out an Indian exception to the global nonproliferation regime, and a debate quickly ensued, pitting nonproliferation hawks against India boosters and confusing some who considered themselves both. But, while the agreement was heralded by many as belatedly marking the end of the U.S.-India estrangement, I was most excited that the debate was cutting across domestic party lines. Indian-Americans have long determined their political loyalties based on which party they think is "better" for India—often to the exclusion of domestic issues. With both parties now India-friendly, Indian-Americans ought to be further drawn to the bread-and-butter issues of the U.S. mainstream: taxes, health care, labor, and education. Indian-Americans can finally focus on America.

For years, Washington's treatment of New Delhi played an important, if not decisive, part in determining where Indians fell on the political spectrum—and that often meant they fell on the Democratic end. Immigrants from India began to arrive in large numbers in the 1960s, and, though largely apolitical, they brought with them a deep admiration for John F. Kennedy, whose personal charm and emphasis on Third World economic development they found attractive. It didn't hurt that Kennedy sent assistance to India during its 1962 border war with China. And, of course, if it weren't for Democrats, many of those immigrants would never have made it to the United States: It was Lyndon Johnson who steered the 1965 Immigration Act through Congress, ending Europe-heavy country quotas and instead admitting immigrants based on professional skills. Later, President Carter endeared himself to Indian-Americans by visiting the home country and by having a mother, Lillian Carter, who went to India as a 68-year-old Peace Corps volunteer in 1966.

By contrast, Indian-Americans did not take well to Richard Nixon. This June, the declassified transcript of a conversation between Nixon and Henry Kissinger in 1971 showed Nixon calling then–Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi an "old witch" and a "bitch." Kissinger referred to the Indians as "bastards." Meanwhile, Nixon had a special relationship with Pakistan's General Yahya Khan.

Which is not to say that there were no Republicans in the Indian-American community. In the 1980s, political diversity was growing: In Midland, Texas, where I lived, Indian-American engineers were mostly Democrats, while the (wealthier) doctors were mostly Republicans, thanks to President Reagan's tax-cutting zeal. Still, when "aunties" and "uncles"—the polite terms kids use to address Indian adults—would debate taxes, Iran Contra, or some other issue of the day, the Dems could often score a decisive blow with two (and a half) words: Zia ul-Haq. The Islamist Pakistani dictator was Reagan's buddy—the beneficiary of U.S. largesse and military assistance. Bad for India.

But, when the cold war ended, several trends started to shrink the "Indian" and amplify the "American" within the Indian-American community. Second-generation Indian-Americans grew up American and adopted the political habits of their peers. And, although immigrant parents still focused on their birthplace, the high-stakes game with the Soviet Union was gone and decades of living in America had weakened ties to India. Last year, debates in the Indian-American community were refreshingly partisan—similar to those around the country. Democrats and Republicans locked horns over medical malpractice, taxes, health care, Iraq, and (U.S.) national security. Not always high-minded debates, but at least U.S.-centric ones.

Still, some India talk lingered. Too many quibbled about John Kerry's and Bush's policies on outsourcing and Pakistan in the context of which were better for India. And, unfortunately, the U.S.-India Political Action Committee, a PAC that claims to represent two million Americans who happen to be ethnically Indian, walks and talks very much like a group lobbying for India. To break the logjam once and for all, Democrats and Republicans both have to see India at least roughly the same way. Maybe that has finally happened. With Bush's embrace of India, arguing that one party or the other is better for the motherland is going to require the uncles and aunties to do some serious hair-splitting. That will force Americans of Indian origin to duke it out based on political principles and what's good for the communities in which they live. The dinner discussions back in Texas will have less to do with India and more to do with the United States. And it's about time.

JAI SINGH

Jai Singh is research editor at Foreign Policy.

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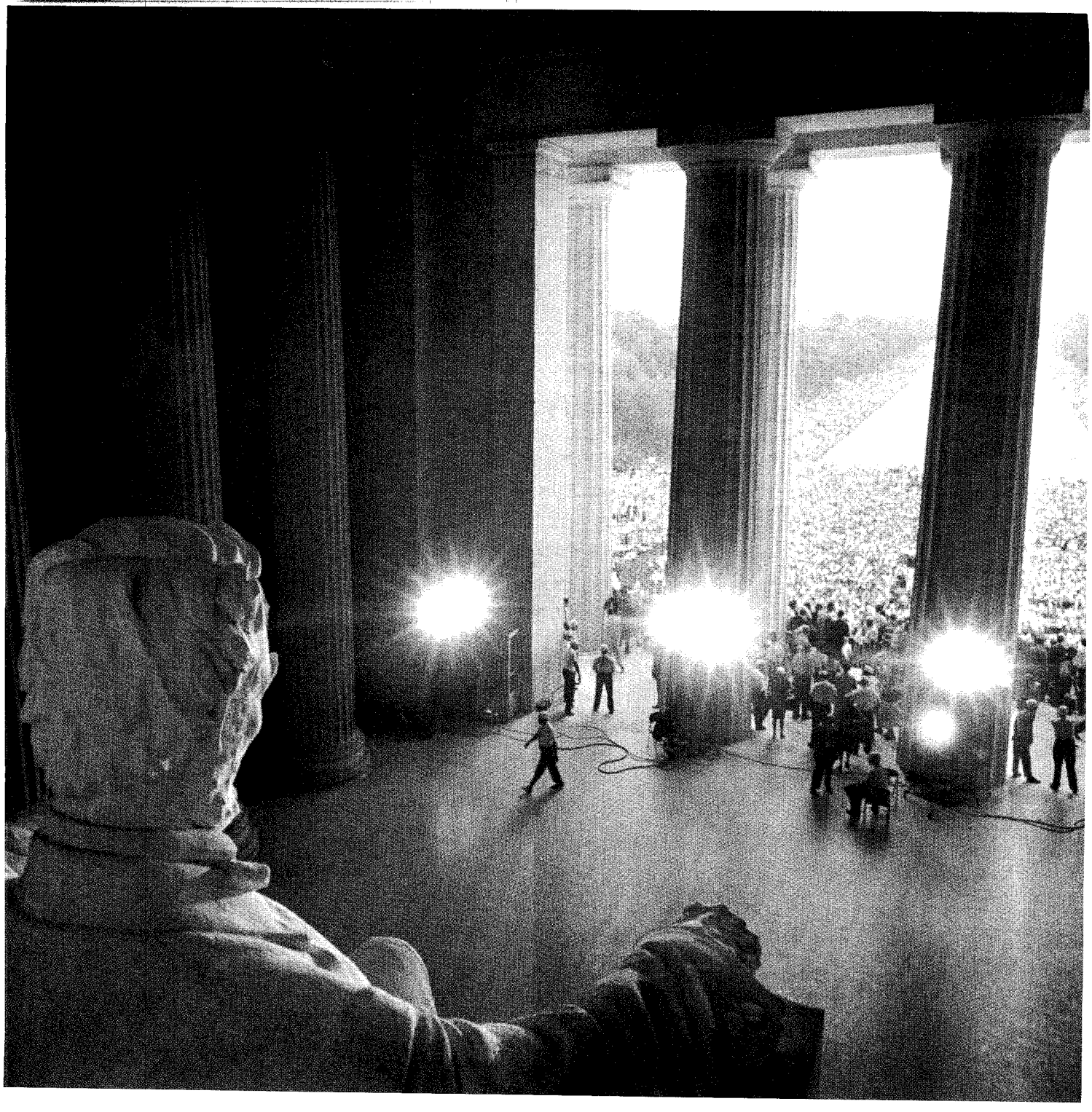

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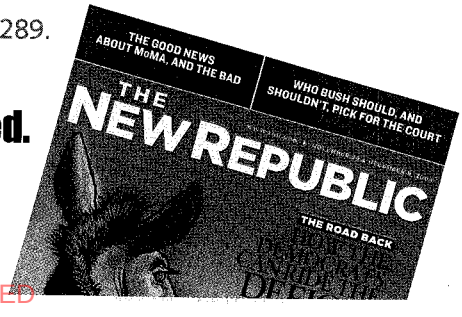

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Primary Reform

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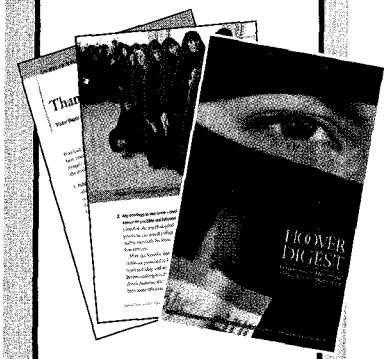

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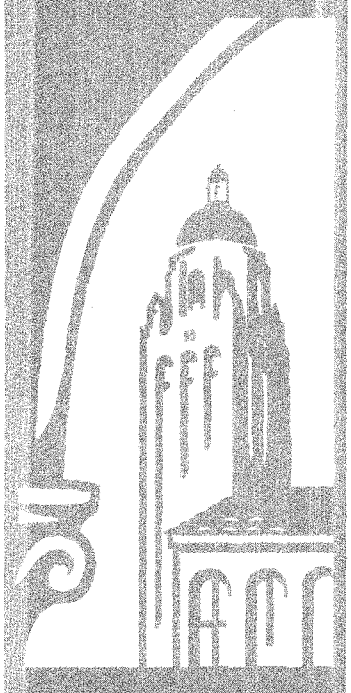

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Every four years, America goes to the polls to elect a president, which invariably leads to complaints about how we choose our nation's leader—a process that begins with the inordinate political and media attention given to the New Hampshire primary and Iowa caucuses.

Last year was no different. Not long after the final votes were tallied, Democratic activists in both Michigan and a bloc of states west of the Mississippi River lobbied to move their states to the front of the primary process, to undermine the influence of Iowa and New Hampshire. **Such reform is long overdue and worthy of serious consideration by both major parties.**

Although there are positive aspects to voting early in Iowa and New Hampshire—the high turnout, the smaller electorates that afford a more personal style of "retail" politics—the two states are not the best barometers of national sentiment. They both lack diversity (both are predominantly white). Candidates far too often resort to pandering—farm, ethanol, and heating-oil subsidies—that is beneath the dignity of the office. As for the media, returning to the same two states every four years makes for lazy journalism.

Moreover, the two states are lousy at predicting the November winner; George W. Bush, in 2000, was the only nonincumbent to win the presidency and the Iowa caucuses, whereas his father, in 1988, was the only nonincumbent to win the New Hampshire primary and go on to the Oval Office.

How, then, do we fix the presidential nomination process? Try leading off with at least two states that represent the middle of the political spectrum as defined by the previous national election. To do this, divide the fifty states according to popular vote and find the handful of states in which the winning candidate barely lost or won. If applied to last November's results, these states would be Ohio (the median), Colorado, Iowa, Nevada, and New Mexico. Iowa, however, should be eliminated because of its lack of diversity and being too rural.

This would leave the parties with more intriguing campaign terrains. Nevada, for example, is a traditionally conservative state whose politics are changing owing to Las Vegas's population influx. Colorado offers a similar political mosaic. Its capital city, Denver, has a majority minority population. Although a reliably Republican "red" state in presidential years, it elected a Democrat to the U.S. Senate last fall. The state is also home to both conservative and liberal activism, ranging from abortion and affirmative action to Ward Churchill, the controversial University of Colorado professor.

The main advantage of this new primary system is novelty. No one state would dominate the proceedings, as do New Hampshire and Iowa now. Every four years, the parties would be looking at a mostly new set of states (twenty years ago, by contrast, the electoral "median" states were Delaware, Michigan, Missouri, and Vermont). This offers the potential for new campaign tactics and fresher media coverage.

In presidential politics, as in life, a change of scenery can be a good thing.

—Bill Whalen

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